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A LEAP *in the* DARK

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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A LEAP IN THE DARK

A Novel

By

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"The Trail of the Serpent," "A Skeleton in the Closet,"
"Nearest and Dearest," "The Lost Lady of Lone," Etc.

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A LEAP IN THE DARK

CHAPTER I

A MAD ACT

The cliffs that rear their haughty head
High o'er the river's darksome bed
Were here all naked, wild and gray.
There waving all with greenwood spray,
Here, trees from every crevice grew,
And o'er the crags their branches threw,
And there, all splintered and uneven,
The shivered rocks ascend to heaven.—SCOTT.

What, thundering, comes through blackest night?
—BYRON.

IT was night, in the depths of the mountain wilderness—a clear March night, with the young crescent moon and the stars to light it.

There was a long, deep, narrow valley, running north and south for many miles, flanked east and west by towering mountains.

The range on the east was called Catamount Cliffs, that on the west Panther Peak.

Deep down in the bottom of the valley ran a low and

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narrow river called the Umbra, because the lofty, wooded mountains on either side keep it in perpetual shade.

On this March night not a sound disturbed the awful solitude of the wilderness; not a living creature appeared in sight. The birds were asleep in their nests, the beasts in their holes.

Human life seemed far away.

Yet had there been light enough, a human form might have been seen on the eastern range.

It was the figure of a young girl, wrapped in a dark shawl that covered her from head to foot, gliding slowly, slowly down the winding mountain path, now passing out of sight behind a clump of trees, now coming into view again as the path turned in and out in its descent.

Sometimes she paused and leaned against a tree, as if for momentary support, and then the faint light of the moon fell upon an upturned, lovely young face, pallid with despair.

And now another figure appeared upon the scene, another and a taller young girl, enveloped in a long waterproof cloak, whose hood was drawn over her head.

She glided silently down the same path, in the same manner, keeping her eyes upon her predecessor, as if she were "shadowing" her—as indeed she was.

The first girl wound her sinuous way down the mountain side to the very foot of the ridge and edge of the river, between which and herself lay the tracks of a very recently laid railroad, whose trains, twice a day, awoke the awful echoes of the towering rocks.

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Here she sat down on a fallen boulder, let her shawl drop from her form and lie in a heap around her; clasped her hands upon her knees, and turned her woful young face up to the starlit heavens, as if help for her hidden grief were there.

Then she looked vaguely at the little crescent of the moon that was sinking slowly behind the cedar-crowned summit of the western ridge. She watched it out of sight, and then let her glance slowly drop to the river at her feet.

Gazing on the low river, she began to mutter to herself as only the crazed or half-crazed ever do.

"If I dared—if I dared," she whispered, her eyes dilating as she gazed down upon the river, whose shining, smooth, dark surface reflected every star above. "If I only dared to take the plunge. They say the Umbra here has no bottom, at least none that has ever been sounded. To take a header into that would be to plunge down—down—down—down to the center of the earth, perhaps. Night after night I have come here—how many times—how many times; but I have never had the courage to take that plunge! What does the poet say?

Who would not choose
The leap attaining the repose?

Oh, but I cannot—I cannot! Oh, for one brief fit of madness to give me courage to end it all—to end it all with me—who am afraid to die, and more afraid to live. The demon has driven me to this river's brink, night

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after night, but he has never driven me into it. Ah, you may drive a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink or drown. So it is with the demon and me. Ah-h-h!" she suddenly cried, starting to her feet. "What is that?"

It was the noise of the rushing express train from the north, gaining force and volume as it sped onward, its thunders caught up by the echoes of the rocky cliffs on each side of the river, and hurled back and forth with an overwhelming uproar that filled the valley, and seemed to threaten with annihilation every living creature in it.

The girl, standing up, gazed, breathless, upon the rushing monster, whose fiery eyes and bellowing breath were almost upon her.

She pressed her left hand hard upon her heart, and bent forward, her lips apart, her eyes dilated to their utmost capacity and blazing fiercely, as with the suddenly kindled fires of madness.

Another instant, and with a frenzied yell she threw her arms on high, and, swifter than an arrow from the bow, she shot downward from the bank and threw herself headlong upon the track, under the very heat of the rushing engine.

But swifter than the arrow was the arm of love, as the watcher sprang forward and flung her off, both falling back from the impetus clear of the track, just as the express train thundered onward, shaking the solid foundations of the mountains as it passed.

At last there was silence.

Both girls, motionless, exhausted, half paralyzed, lay

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together where they had fallen. The elder, with every vein and artery throbbing as if they would burst with intense excitement, still clutched the younger in her arms, and held her as in a death grip. Both were panic-stricken, overwhelmed and speechless.

The deliverer was the first to recover herself.

"Were you mad?" she whispered, in a husky and almost inarticulate voice.

"Yes—mad," moaned the other, after a pause.

"Oh, *why* did you do it?"

"I have told you—I was mad!"

There was silence for a few moments, and then the elder spoke again, gravely and tenderly.

"Bevvie! what drove you to desperation?"

"I cannot tell you. Oh, I can never tell you! I wish you had not stopped me! It would have been all over by this time," moaned the girl called Bevvie.

"'All over!'"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!" wailed the girl, rocking herself backward and forward, "for I should have been out of all my misery! Ora! Ora! *Why* did you follow me? *Why* did you interfere with me?"

"I have watched you for weeks; I have followed you for days; I am responsible to the Lord for you; I was in duty bound to save you, even if I had not loved you as I do, ungrateful child!"

"Oh, if you knew—if you knew, Ora! Ah! why did you interfere? It would have been all over now, and I should have been past all my trouble!" wailed Bevvie.

"You say that again! And it is false! 'All over?'

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'Past your trouble?' Foolish girl! You would have been before your Maker for self-murder! You would have exchanged temporal grief for eternal woe!" exclaimed the elder, in a tone of intense emotion.

"Oh, no, I hope not! for I *was* mad then, Ora! I was man then; indeed, I was. I had not thought of doing that act one minute before I did it! But the rush of the engine, the thunder of the noise, the uproar of the echo, the fiery eye, the flaming breath, the vision of swift and sudden death, all fascinated, maddened me as I stood alone in the dark, and drew me down to the destruction from which you snatched me!"

"And yet you seem deeply to regret being saved, and you bitterly reproach me for saving you! You are inconsistent, Bevvie! But that, too, is a symptom of an unsound mind! Come with me! I do not know—I cannot even hazard a conjecture, as to the nature of the grief that has unsettled you. You have steadily refused to tell me. But to-night I am determined to know! for I am in the place of a mother to you, Bevvie, and I am responsible to the Lord for your well-being. Can you walk up the steep?"

"Oh, yes, I can walk," sighed the younger girl.

"Take my arm, then, and do not hesitate to lean on it with all your weight," said Ora, lifting the heavy shawl from the ground, where Bevvie had cast it, wrapping and pinning it carefully around the girl's form, and then tenderly supporting her steps as they left the spot.

And so the foster-mother of twenty-one and the

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adopted daughter of sixteen reascended the mountain path.

It was a very difficult path to climb, even in the daytime, and of course much more so at night, and it might then have been very dangerous to these two girls had they not been so familiar with its windings.

Forty minutes' walk brought them through rocks and woods about one-third of the way to the mountain's top, where they reached an irregular plateau of about five hundred fertile acres stretched here and there among the cliffs.

Standing on this plateau, quite back from the edge of the front and descending precipice, and nearly at the foot of the back and rising precipice, stood a very ancient farm house built of red sandstone, in the simplest form—a large double house of two stories, with a great chimney at each gable end, with a steep roof, and upper and lower piazzas running the whole breadth of the building both at the front and the back.

A large double door painted green gave entrance to a wide hall with two rooms on each side, making four rooms on that floor; there were also four rooms above and four in the attic—twelve in all for this commodious homestead.

A lawn well shaded with oak and elm trees, old patriarchs of the forest, lay before this picturesque building.

The girls crossed this lawn and entered the house by the green double door.

An oil lamp hanging from the ceiling of the hall dimly lighted the place, showing the closed doors of the

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four rooms and the flight of stairs leading to the chambers above.

"Have they all gone to bed? Is it late?" whispered Bevvie, almost in fear.

"Oh, no, it is not late, and no one has gone to bed. It is catechism night, you know, and Aunt Marcie and Aunt Countie are trying to teach the little darkies their creed. The seven deadly sins is the subject of the lesson to-night, I believe. I should think they would learn them fast enough without any teaching!" added Ora, with a little silvery laugh.

At that moment the door of the back room on the left-hand side opened, a stream of red fire-light and candle-light poured into the dim hall, and the form of a short, round, fat and rosy old lady in a light calico gown and white mob cap appeared in the door-way.

"Oh, is it you, girls? You oughtn't to stay out so late, children. You'll catch cold. Come in and shut the hall door. Do you want anything to eat before you go to bed?" inquired the kindly old lady.

"No, thank you, Aunt Marcie. How do you get on with your little pupils?" inquired Ora.

"Oh, horrid. I can't beat anything into their heads. There's little black Lida; I can't make her understand that anger is a deadly sin, and that every time she gets angry she breaks the sixth commandment and commits murder *in her heart,* you know. You ought to have heared her howl when I told her that. She said she never killed nobody, and wouldn't hurt a fly."

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"Well, she'll understand better when she grows older. Good night, dear Aunt Marcie," said Ora.

"Good night, honey. Good night, Bevvie, *you* oughtn't to be trapesing about the woods at night, if Ora does. You haven't got her health. You are looking real bad. The old squire was saying so this very day, and advising me to call in the new doctor to see what is the matter with you," said the kindly old lady.

Bevvie shuddered and clung to the arm of her protectress.

"Good night, Aunt Marcie," said Ora again; and to cut short the colloquy, she hurried up stairs, drawing her companion after her.

On reaching the upper hall, Ora opened the door of a front room on her right hand, and drew Bevvie into it.

It was a very spacious room, lighted by a cheerful wood fire in the open chimney, which the chilliness of the mountain air at this season still rendered necessary and very pleasant. The room had clean, whitewashed walls, a polished yellow pine floor, three large windows curtained with dimity, two in front and one on the side opposite the door and next to the fireplace. There was a bed with white draperies against the back wall of the chamber, and a toilet-table surmounted by a tall mirror draped with white muslin, standing between the two windows; a wardrobe on the other side of the fireplace at the foot of the bed; a table in the middle of the room, two straw rocking-chairs, and a home-made rug laid down before the fire.

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A very plain room, certainly; but spacious, wholesome and attractive.

Ora took a twisted paper match from a little blue match-vase on the mantel-piece, lit it at the fire and then lighted the two mold candles in their silver-plated candlesticks standing at each end.

Then she drew both arm-chairs to the fire, made Bevvie take one while she herself took the other, and drew the little round table between them.

The light from the two candles on the chimney-self in front fell full upon them both, revealing to view two as beautiful and as strongly contrasted young women as it is possible to imagine.

CHAPTER II

A RETROSPECT

Ora Orkney, the elder girl, was just twenty-one years of age, a beautiful blond Hebe, a very type of youth, health and strength of body, mind and spirit. She was above the medium height, with a fully developed form, a large, finely rounded bust, a well-turned head covered with warm, golden-brown curling hair; a short, oval face with low, broad forehead, short, straight nose, very full red lips, rounded, prominent chin, and well-curved white throat meeting the generous bosom. Her complexion was called "high"; it was, in

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reality, fair and very blooming. Her eyes were bright blue. Her expression was full of happiness—generally of calm delight, but occasionally of radiant joy.

She was an ardent lover of life and nature. She loved action, and equally well loved ease in its turn. She could keenly enjoy a skate upon the frozen river, a course down the snowy steep, a gallop over the mountains, or a ride behind the fox-hounds, all in their season; or, with a book in her hand, she could luxuriate in a cushioned arm chair beside the winter fire or in a bank of violets in the summer garden. Her chief mental attribute was conscientiousness; her chief moral one, benevolence. But her governing principle was self-reliance—not to say self-will.

She was the only child and heiress of the late General Orestes Orkney, of Hall-in-Umbra, an old colonial manor-house that stood in the Woods of Umbra, at the north end of the valley and on the east bank of the river.

In the first year of her infant life Ora had lost her young mother through an epidemic malignant fever that had prevailed in the city where they were passing a few months, and then she became the idol and the only comfort of her widowed father.

Later on, when Ora was but five years old, the general was ordered to the Western frontier to put down an insurrection of the Ute Indians, and there, in a few months, he met his death at the hands of a treacherous Indian chief and his gang.

Having been "mindful of the uncertainty of human

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life," General Orkney had made his will before setting out on his fatal expedition, and had made every provision and given every direction for the nurture and education of his only daughter and heiress, appointing his brother-in-law, Elijah Mossop, farmer, and his own sister, Constantia Orkney, spinster, the co-guardians of her person and the co-trustees of her estate.

The event proved that his foresight had not been fruitless.

Little Ora grew up in the Convent of the Annunciation, where her father had placed his daughter in the care of the sisterhood, and where by will he had directed that she should remain until her majority.

There she had developed into the fair, strong, healthful and joyous young woman that we have depicted.

Her convent life had been varied only by semi-annual visits, at midsummer and at Christmas, to her guardians and relatives at Owlwood farm.

But on the first of the preceding June, about ten months previous to the commencement of this story, she had come of age, and when, two weeks later, the midsummer holidays commenced, Ora Orkney left the convent forever.

She was now a free agent; full of life and spirits, self-reliance and self-will.

She did not, therefore, go down to the farm for the midsummer as heretofore, but accepted the invitation of one of her school-mates who had graduated from the convent school that year, and she went with her friend and her friend's family for a tour through New England

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and Canada, that occupied the whole summer and early autumn.

Since the middle of the preceding October, however, the heiress had been domiciled at Owlwood,

A half-feared, half-welcome guest,

for indeed the gentle, discreet women of the farm knew not what to do with the self-willed young girl, who in turn excited their admiration, love, wonder and terror.

So much for Ora Orkney, who ran into the jaws of death to rescue her protégé from destruction.

But what of that protégé? And what was the secret of her great interest in the eyes of the heiress?

In truth, no one knew much more than has been here set forth.

Her name was Bevvie Boone. She was the adopted daughter of Ora Orkney, and had been such ever since she was a babe of five weeks old and her protectress a little woman of five years. But of this more presently.

We said that there could not be a greater contrast between two beautiful young women than there was between Ora Orkney and Bevvie Boone.

If Ora was a fair and blooming Hebe, full of joyous life, her protégé was the very opposite of all this.

Bevvie Boone was below the medium height, and very slender, but not thin, for her frame was small and well rounded with flesh. Her form, though petite, was perfectly beautiful. Her head was small and round, and covered with a rich profusion of clustering black ring-

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lets. Her face was a perfect oval; her features were small, delicate and regular; her complexion was of a pure, clear cream color, without a tinge of bloom; but was beautifully relieved by the clusters of night black hair, the fire of burning black eyes and the glow of ardent crimson lips. Her expression was thoughtful, dreamy, pensive. She seldom smiled, and never laughed.

She cared little for nature, for scenery, or for outdoor exercise. She loved music, poetry and romance.

She had one master passion that absorbed her whole soul—to love and be loved by one. In childhood this had been a dream; in earliest youth a reality, and now it was a remorse!

How this tropical child of passion came into such close and intimate relations with the young heiress of Umbra must now be explained.

When General Orkney took his little, motherless five-year-old daughter to the Convent of the Annunciation to be reared and educated there, it was in accordance with the last wishes of his beloved and lamented wife, who had herself graduated from that school. He also had a dear sister among the nuns.

On the day that he entered his child upon the rolls, he was invited by the lady superior of the convent to go through the various departments of the institution on a tour of sight-seeing.

He courteously accepted the invitation, but when the nuns would have relieved him of the child, he declined to part with her then, explaining that as these were

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their last hours together for many months or years, he preferred to keep her near him until the last moment.

So it happened that the little daughter accompanied her father and their guide through all the various departments of the institution—through the many class-rooms, refectories and dormitories of the young ladies' academy; through the charity schools, through the chapel, and finally through the infant asylum, which last visit was destined to have the most momentous effect upon all the little girl's after life.

The Convent of the Annunciation occupied a whole city square—the academy and the chapel fronting the principal avenue, the charity school and the domestic offices on the side streets opposite each other, and the infant asylum on the back street.

There were then but about a dozen children in the building, their ages two to six years old. They were all in charge of three nuns.

When General Orkney and his daughter, conducted by the Sister Agnes, who was the aunt of the little girl, entered the nursery, they found these infants at their early dinner.

They were clothed in clean pink calico frocks, with white cotton aprons; and with ruddy faces and smooth short hair, were seated in high chairs each side a narrow pine table covered with a white cloth. Before each child was a bowl of oatmeal porridge and milk. Attending them was a young nun whose business seemed to be to teach the smallest infants to use their spoons.

While the visitors were looking on this pretty scene,

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a certain bell rang in the adjoining entry, a wheel was heard to turn, a low exclamation, a whispered conversation, and then, as they passed out, they met an old nun with a very young infant in her arms. The babe seemed little more than a month old; it was clothed in fine white linen cambric and soft white flannel, and wrapped in a white merino shawl. Conspicuously on the outside of this shawl was pinned a sealed envelope.

"What is this, Sister Dominica?" inquired the nun Agnes, while General Orkney paused, with his little daughter still in his hand.

"You see what it is! It is a babe that has just been placed in our basket. You must have heard the bell ring and the wheel turn," replied the old nun, as she sat down on the nearest wooden chair and laid the sleeping child on her lap.

"There is a letter pinned to its clothes; take it off and let us look at it," said Sister Agnes.

"No; send for our superior. *She* must open this letter," replied Sister Dominica.

"I will go and fetch her. Orestes, you will be here when I return?" inquired Sister Agnes, turning to her brother-in-law.

"Oh, yes; I shall be here," replied the general, who felt too much interested to leave the place just then.

Agnes hurried away on her errand.

The old nun sat motionless, with the sleeping babe on her lap. The general stood before her. The young nun who was waiting on the children's table in the ad-

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joining room came once or twice to the door, but was too well trained to leave her duties to gratify her curiosity.

As for little Ora, she had never in her short, isolated life at Hall-in-Umbra seen a very young babe—a real, live doll! The sight was a marvel, a beauty and a delight to her. She knelt down by the knee of the old nun and gazed with rapt adoration upon the beautiful, wonderful creature. She longed, yet feared to touch it.

The mother superior of the convent soon entered the room, attended by Sister Agnes. She was a rosy, wholesome, good-humored little lady, with none of the traditional pallor of the nun or austerity of the abbess about her.

She bowed to the general, whom she had taken leave of half an hour before.

He returned her salute, saying:

"I have happened here at an interesting moment, madam."

"Yes; another poor little waif of humanity has been left at our door," said the lady superior, as the old nun who held the babe stood up to present it to better view.

"A healthy-looking child, too. It sleeps; probably drugged, as they often are—poor little ones—when left here," remarked the abbess, as she carefully unpinned the envelope from the baby's shawl, and proceeded to unseal it and examine its contents.

The old nun and Sister Agnes bent over to see. The young nun from the children's room put her head in at the door to hear.

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The abbess took a bank note and a card from the envelope.

The first she crumpled in her hand and thrust it into her pouch. The second she read aloud:

She was born on the 21st of July, and she is five weeks old to-day. Her name is Belvidera. She may or may not be claimed some day. Do what you please with her.

"Now, what is the first thing to be done with her?" inquired Sister Dominica, sinking back again into her chair, and laying the baby over her knees.

"She must be waked up. She is sleeping under the influence of an opiate. But the physician will make his usual visit in a few minutes now. We will wait for his opinion. It may not be necessary to wake her, after all. Sister Dominica, sit where you are and hold the child on your lap a little longer, until the doctor sees her. General Orkney, I have pressing duties to look after. Permit me to bid you good morning," said the mother superior.

The gallant general bowed very low as the lady passed out of the room.

All this time nobody had noticed Ora, who had been fidgeting around the little stranger in the highest state of excitement, standing on tiptoe when the baby was lifted up, and sinking again on her knees when the baby was laid down, and never turning her fascinated, adoring, worshiping eyes from its sleeping face.

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She understood from the talk around her, to which she listened with the most eager and intense interest, that this baby belonged to nobody in particular—that it was lost, or found, or something; but to her apprehension it was a discovered treasure, a pearl of the greatest price, something that everybody must covet, and claim, and cherish, and defend, and quarrel over, if necessary.

Yet nobody seemed to want it much, or to be very glad that they had found it. How strange! thought little Ora.

If they would only let *her* have it! *She* wanted it so much! Oh! it was *so* pretty! Oh! the lovely little round head, covered all over, young as it was, with flossy black hair, and the lovely little dimpled face! and the sweet little eyes, though they were shut! and the wonderful little nose and mouth and ears! and oh, the little, tiny, plump, doubled fists! Ora fairly gasped with delight, and trembled with awe as she gazed upon this beautiful, wonderful creature.

"Come, my little daughter; you seem under a spell," said the general, preparing to go.

"Oh, papa!" cried the child, suddenly finding her voice, "let me have her! *Please* let me have this baby for my own—for my very, *very* own!"

"Why, my darling," smiled the general, "what could you do with it?"

"I would be her little mamma. I would love her dearly. I would save all my pocket money to buy her clothes. Oh! dear, sweet, darling papa, let me have

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her for my child!" pleaded Ora, holding up her arms to embrace and coax her father.

"Why, my pet, you would soon get tired of that," said the general with a fond gaze upon his little enthusiast.

"Oh; *never, never, never,* dear papa! I would rather have her than a hundred dolls! Why, she is *alive,* you know! Oh! you dear, kind, good, sweet papa, say yes!"

"Why, my little monkey, I have nothing to do with it. This child is not mine to dispose of. It is given to the infant asylum," urged the general.

"But nobody wants her here, papa. Don't you *know* they don't? Nobody but me. And oh! I want her—the sweet, sweet, sweet thing—so much!" pleaded Ora.

"But, my dear little girl——" began the general.

The nun Agnes touched him on his sleeve and arrested his further speech.

"What is it, sister?" he inquired, turning toward her.

"Let the child have her way. It is an inspiration. 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.' You know the text," said Sister Agnes, solemnly.

"But—how is she to have her way? I have no right to dispose of that baby. And, if I had, and could give it to my little daughter, what could she, a baby herself, do with another baby? Agnes, my dear, you are as foolish as she is," replied the general, with a laugh.

"Listen to *me,*" said the nun Agnes, solemnly; and the general obeyed with a humorous gravity, while little Ora looked anxiously from one speaker to the other,

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watching the controversy as if her soul depended on its issue.

"You are rich," continued Sister Agnes; "and Ora, your only daughter, will be rich. You can afford to adopt this poor little forsaken babe, who will never be claimed. You can leave it here as the protégé of your little daughter. Let her look upon the babe as her adopted child; let her consider herself as its little foster-mother, responsible for its well-being. Let her save her pocket-money to buy milk and clothes for her child. Tell me—*can* there be a better training in self-denial and charity than this that the child desires, and that I advocate? Think before you speak, my dear brother."

"It is good; very good, though somewhat new," said the general after a surprised look and a thoughtful pause. "But how is it all to end?" he inquired.

"We cannot foresee the future. But this, being good, cannot end ill."

The general looked down in thoughtful silence. His little daughter seized his hands and renewed her pleadings. Then the decision came.

"The plan is a most excellent one, Sister Agnes; and, moreover, it will console my little girl here for the absence of her father. The only objectionable feature about it is its strangeness."

"That objection would apply to very many excellent things, my brother," replied the nun.

"Yes, yes; well, we will hear what the lady abbess will have to say about it, for it will rest with her to decide, after all," reflected the general.

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"The lady abbess will be only too glad to accept your terms. We have too many little waifs on our hands not to be very happy when any one of them can be provided for," said Sister Agnes.

And the event proved that she was right. The abbess, when appealed to, very gratefully accepted the offer of General Orkney to pay for the support and education of the forsaken babe, on condition that it should be considered as the protégé of his little daughter, and should have its wants supplied from the pocket-money with which he would furnish her, and that she should have access to the baby once every day.

And so, having made his little girl as happy as she could be under the circumstances, General Orkney took leave of the convent, and that same day departed on his far Western journey.

This was in the last week in July, in the midst of the midsummer vacation, and therefore little Ora was not to be put to study until the reopening of the school on the first Monday in September. She was to remain in the interim in charge of her relative, Sister Agnes, and a fine time the gentle nun was destined to have with her wayward little niece.

Ora was so transported with delight at the nominal possession of her "child" that she could scarcely realize the fact of her parting with her father. She shocked and scandalized Sister Agnes by saying exultingly:

"You see, auntie, I had my own way after all, hadn't I?"

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"Yes, my love; your dear father was very good to you," gravely responded the nun.

"Yes; and I always have had my own way!" exclaimed the child, ignoring the mention of her father.

"Why, how is that?" uneasily inquired the nun.

"Oh, by coaxing, and sometimes by storming!" exclaimed the little girl, raising her voice and lifting her bright blue eyes to the tender dark orbs of the recluse.

"I am sorry to hear that, Ora."

"Well, I am sorry you are sorry; for I always mean to have my own way—*always!*"

She, in fact, tried the experiment on her new governesses that very evening, when she insisted that her "child"—*her* "child"—should be brought to sleep with her, in the little dormitory that she shared with Sister Agnes. And it was only by great patience and forbearance, and with the greatest difficulty, that the nun could convince the self-willed child that this could never be permitted.

Finally Miss Orkney was persuaded to listen to reason, and then she graciously consented that her child should be taken care of by the nurses of the infant asylum, on condition that she should go and see it every day, as her father had stipulated, and that no one should ever pretend to dispute her claim to it, or dare to say that was not its own dear mamma and it was not her own dear child.

She gave her aunt all her pocket-money to save up to buy milk and clothes for her child.

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CHAPTER III

AGNES BELVIDERA

When Sunday came, Ora was privileged to be present at the baptism of the babe, and to stand sponsor for it.

The sisterhood very much objected to the name of Belvidera, which had been given to the babe by an unknown friend or enemy; it was a vain, romantic name, and not a good one; nevertheless, they felt bound to let it stand, for the future possible identification by her family; but they took care to prefix a saint's name for her protection; and so she was christened Agnes Belvidera.

And for years she had no other name; until Ora Orkney, recognizing the necessity, added the surname of Boone. "Not after the famous hunter of Kentucky," exclaimed Miss Orkney at the time, "but because she really is a boon to me."

Ora never tired of her child; never grudged her anything, though the older the little one grew the costlier she became, until it took every penny of the girl's pocket-money to provide her with comfortable clothing alone; for the training in self-denial, for charity's sake, was to go on; though indeed Ora did not realize the self-denial or understand the charity. She spent her money in the manner she liked best. She gave because it delighted her to give.

Little Bevvie was her doll, her kitten, her bird, her

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baby, and all toys and all pets and all delights rolled into one. She loved her child with all her loving heart, and the child returned her love, and crowed and shouted with joy whenever Ora came into the nursery.

When the school reopened on the first of September, and the pretty little story of the baby's adoption got bruited about, every one who heard it was deeply interested and went so far as to call the little girl an angel and her father a saint. But as neither of them was either one or the other, it was very wise and prudent of Sister Agnes to guard Ora from the knowledge of this praise, lest it should make the simple soul a vainglorious one.

When at last the terribe news of the massacre of Fort Defense and the death of General Orkney came to Owlwood farmhouse, and was carried by Mr. Elijah Mossop to his niece at the Convent of the Annunciation, Ora was called to suffer the first great trial of her young life.

She went nearly wild with despair, and had to be taken from her studies and placed in the infirmary under medical treatment.

Happily there was no other inmate, and she had the pleasant room all to herself and her devoted attendant Sister Agnes.

After awhile she sobbed a petition for her "child" to be brought to her. And then, as a doll is given to a little girl to comfort her in any little grief, so Baby Bevvie, then nearly two years old, was brought to Ora,

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and allowed to stay with her, and for the first time to sleep with her.

There is a heaven-born power in infancy to soothe the sorrow of the human heart, as surely as any blessed balsam ever relieved physical pain—even in subjects older and harder than Ora.

The nurse did not need to give the throbbing, hysterical orphan any more paregoric after Baby Bevvie was laid in the bed beside her.

She grew better from that hour, and was soon at her studies again. But she did not forget her handsome and gallant young father, stricken down in the prime of his glorious manhood. She held his memory in the most tender and admiring love and reverence, and daily talked to Baby Bevvie of him and his goodness to her, as if the infant could understand.

And Bevvie would look very grave and wise, and assent to everything her mamma said, with the one little formula:

"'Es, Odo, 'es."

When General Orkney's will was read, it was discovered that, in addition to having named Elijah Mossop and Constantia Orkney the guardians of his daughter's person and the trustees of her estate and executors of his will, he had made a codicil providing for Agnes Belvidera in a very singular way. He had instructed his executors, besides the handsome allowance for his daughter's maintenance and education at the Convent of the Annunciation, to pay over to herself a quarterly sum of one hundred and fifty dollars for pocket money, that she

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might have means to answer any appeals of charity which should touch her heart or conscience. And he left a legacy of five thousand dollars in trust of his executors, to be paid to Agnes Belvidera on her majority, if she should live to meet it, or, failing that, to the infant asylum at the same convent.

This codicil created a great deal of wonder and disapprobation at Owlwood Farm.

Who in the world was Agnes Belvidera? And what in the mischief was the sense of giving away five thousand dollars out of the family treasury or of allowing fifty dollars a month pocket money to a child seven years old? they asked one another.

When, however, they learned the quaint little history of Baby Bevvie's adoption, they understood the situation better.

Elijah Mossop then declared that his brother-in-law was "a good fellow, though a queer lot—a regular Don Quixote."

They saw Bevvie Boone for the first time when Ora Orkney, at the age of fifteen, took her "child," aged ten, to spend a long midsummer vacation at Owlwood Farm.

Half curious and half indignant, yet wholly unable to remonstrate or to violate the laws of hospitality, the discreet women of Owlwood received the singular pair—Ora, fair, blooming, buoyant, with sunny hair and azure eyes, full of life and laughter; and Bevvie, a grave, pale child, with hair and eyes as dark as night—a child given to reverie and dreams, not to talk, still less to play.

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"She's always so!" exclaimed Ora to her Aunt Mossop, whose kindly heart became interested in the little girl, no matter who she was, as she said to herself. "Always, always so! You would think, to look at her, that I was her stepmother instead of her own dear mamma, and that I beat and starved her instead of cherishing her as the apple of my eye and the core of my heart! Wouldn't you now, Aunt Mossop?"

"How you do talk, Oresta!" gravely replied the good woman in a non-committal way.

After this the pair ceased to be criticized. At the end of the holidays they returned to the convent, where Bevvie Boone, being then ten years of age, was entered as a pupil in the same academy where Ora Orkney was continuing her education.

Then they became inseparable companions, studying in the same school-room, exercising in the same playground, eating at the same table, sleeping in the same dormitory.

New pupils always took them for sisters, although they were so unlike. These were told that they were friends; for, as the years passed, the story of Bevvie's adoption had been allowed to pass also into oblivion, or apparent oblivion.

Yet still Ora Orkney called the little girl her child and took her to Owlwood Farm every midsummer vacation and every Christmas holiday.

Bevvie was a studious girl and made such rapid progress in her studies that she soon overtook the most advanced pupils in the academy; and when, in accordance

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with General Orkney's will, his daughter Ora, having attained her twenty-first birthday, was to leave the convent, her "child," Bevvie, then sixteen years of age, had mastered the full academic course, had graduated with the highest honors, and was prepared to leave the convent with her mamma.

"You see, Aunt Agnes," said Ora to the nun on the day of their departure, "my child has done us all the very greatest credit. I expect marvelous things of her yet! Mind! my child will be sure to make her mark in the world!"

"I hope that she may do well," was the moderate reply of the nun.

As has been stated, Ora Orkney did not go from the convent direct to Owlwood Farm. She accepted the pressing invitation of a schoolmate, who had also graduated with the class of that year, to join a select party of tourists who were going to travel through New England and Canada, and, taking Bevvie with her of course, she had spent the three months of July, August and September in constant and delightful change of scene.

About the first of October, she parted with her traveling companions, but still she did not go directly to Owlwood.

Halting at a highly respectable boarding house in Richmond, to which one of her party had introduced her by letter, she wrote to her late guardians, telling them that she knew that they expected her to make her home at the farm for the present, but that she did not know whether they were willing to take her child with

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her. If they were not, she should remain in Richmond, until her own house, Hall-in-Umbra, could be vacated by her tenant and made ready for her reception; for she could not, in any case, be separated from her child.

The good people at the farm had long been reconciled to Bevvie.

Mr. Elijah Mossop wrote back that Ora must come to them immediately and bring her protégé, for both should be welcome. He urged her to lose no time in coming, as his own health was failing and he wished to surrender into her hands the title deeds of her estates and other documents left in his charge as her guardian and trustee.

Ora gladly packed up, and taking her child hurried back to the farm.

She found her Uncle Mossop even worse than she expected. He lived, indeed, only long enough to settle his affairs in this world, and then he passed peacefully away to the other.

Ora set herself with all her soul to comfort the widow —whose greatest comfort, however, was found in her own homely and oft-expressed thought:

"'Fore very long, you know, child, I shall follow of him."

As the winter passed, another subject of anxiety diverted Ora's attention from Mrs. Mossop; this was the state of her child.

Bevvie, who had always been pale, grave and dreamy, now sank into a deep melancholy, from which nothing could rouse her.

It was in vain that Ora challenged her for gallops

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over the mountains, or rides behind the fox hounds, or bought for her the most attractive and entertaining books.

Bevvie would neither ride nor read, nor do anything but sit and dream in her room, or steal out and take long, lonely walks in the wildest fastnesses of the mountains or along the darkest banks of the Umbra River.

"Worst of it, my dear Oresta," said Miss Constantia Orkney, "is that we do not know who she is, or what she is. There may be insanity in her unknown family, and it may take the form of melancholy madness with her. Ah! my dear, when you took the responsibility of this child upon your hands, you took a 'leap in the dark.' Now, at any rate, she must be looked after."

After this Ora became more anxious than before, and would have joined Bevvie in all her solitary walks, but that the girl at first moodily rejected all companionship and at last successfully eluded the closest observation, to steal off alone.

Then Ora began to watch her secretly—"shadow" her, as the detectives say—and so it followed, on that dark March night on which Bevvie, in a sudden accession of frenzy, threw herself across the railway track just in front of the rushing engine, Ora was on hand to save her, even at the risk of her life—to "pluck her as a brand from the burning."

But Ora had been too tremendously shaken to recover her composure in an hour; and now that the two sat together there before the wood fire in Ora's quiet room, she felt almost too much overwhelmed and exhausted

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to ask for the explanation she was so anxious to hear.

Yet this condition of mind did not show itself in the strong, healthy young body, with her fully developed form, rounded, sloping arms, large, beautiful bust, sunny hair, azure eyes and blooming cheeks—it took a great deal to change Ora's color.

She still presented a complete contrast to her companion with the petite but perfect form, the small head, the little, long, oval face, the cream-colored complexion, lighted up by night-black hair and eyes and glowing crimson lips.

At last Ora took the small white hand of the girl in her own plump, rosy one, and said, in the gentlest tone:

"Bevvie, my child, I think no mother ever loved her child more than I do you. Don't you know it, dear?"

"Yes, yes," moaned the girl.

"There is nothing in my power to do, absolutely nothing, Bevvie, that I would not do to make you happy. Don't you know that, dear?"

"I believe it," she whispered in almost dying tones.

"You may tell me the cause of your melancholy and despair. I cannot even form the most distant conjecture of what it is, Bevvie, or what trouble can possibly have come to you unknown to me—to me, from whom you have never been separated for a day since you were five weeks old. But you may tell me with perfect confidence, Bevvie, and I will do everything in my power, under all circumstances, to make you happy."

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CHAPTER IV

THE SECRET OUT

Now, lock the chamber door, dear,
  And say you left me sleeping,
And never tell to one here
  Of all this bitter weeping.

Oh, why should vows so fondly made
  Be broken ere the morrow,
To one who loves as never maid
  Loved in this world of sorrow?

The look of scorn I cannot brave,
  Nor pity's eye more dreary;
A quiet sleep within the grave
  Is all for which I weary.
—The Ettrick Shepherd.

Bevvie threw herself into the arms of her friend and burst into a storm of tears and sobs.

Ora clasped the girl close to her bosom, and kissed and caressed her as if she had been a little child, but spoke no word until the storm had spent itself. Then Ora whispered tenderly:

"Now, dearest, tell me all about it, and you will feel relieved."

Bevvie hid her face on the comforting bosom, and gasped:

"I could not help it! Oh, indeed, Ora, to save my life, to save my soul, I could not help it!"

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"No, no, you could not, poor child," assented the sympathizer, soothingly, but without the least idea of what it was all about.

"It was because I loved him so! Oh, Ora, I loved him more than life, more than my soul!"

"Ah!" cried Miss Orkney, as if she had received a stab.

"You are shocked! You are angry with me! I knew you must be angry!" wailed Bevvie.

"No, dearest, not angry; not the least angry. When was I ever angry with you, Bevvie?" tenderly inquired Ora, as she bent over the little head that lay upon her breast until her sunny brown curls mingled with the jetty black ringlets. "When was I ever angry with you, Bevvie?"

"Never, my guardian angel, never. But, though I have given you much cause for anger in the past, I have not given you such cause as now. Ah, if you were to cast me off forever to-night, I could not blame you for it!" moaned the miserable girl.

"Do not talk so wildly, Bevvie. You know that I will never forsake you. But tell me, dearest, what it was that you could not help," said Ora Orkney, running her fingers with soothing gentleness through Bevvie's black curls. "What was it you could not help?"

"Oh, Ora, do not blame me. Do not hate me. Do not despise me, Ora. I shall go mad or die if you do. But —but—I could not help loving him—and—and—so—so——" Here the girl broke down, and hid her face more completely on the bosom of her friend.

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"Yes—yes. Well—well?" softly inquired Ora, bending her head low over the bowed one on her bosom.

"Ora, this is a deep, deep secret. If I tell you, promise me that you will never tell it again to any human being," breathlessly exclaimed Bevvie, as if she had just remembered to take this precaution.

"I promise you that I will never reveal your secret without your leave, and you may trust my word, darling," said Ora in a reassuring tone, though her own heart was tortured by the sharpest anxiety.

"Oh, yes, yes! Do I not know how I could trust you? Whom under heaven could I trust so much as you, my guardian angel?" warmly exclaimed the young girl.

"This is the second time to-night you have called me your guardian angel. Do not do so again, dear Bevvie. It is not right. You have a guardian angel, dearest, as you have been taught, but not in the flesh. And now, dear, that you have my promise, give me your confidence," said the young lady.

The girl raised her head, took a deep breath, as if nerving herself for her confession, and then said:

"Ora, I am married."

"Married!" echoed the young lady, aghast, yet, for some reason that she could not understand, much relieved.

"Yes, married," repeated the girl—dropping her head and hiding her face again upon her comforter's bosom, and muttering, in muffled tones, her piteous prayer: "Oh, do not hate me for it—do not, Ora! You, who snatched me from death, do not make life more bitter

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than death! Do not make life too hard to bear. Do not hate me, Ora!"

"'Hate' you, poor child. As if it were possible to hate my child! If you cannot feel how much I love you, Bevvie, how can I make you know it?" gently inquired the young lady.

"Oh, I do feel and know it, Ora! But love can turn to hate——"

"Self-love can, but not love," replied Ora.

"And my fault! Oh, my fault! My deception of you! My teachery toward you! Oh, you may forgive me, my pitying angel, but I can never forgive myself! How could I have so deceived you, Ora? How could I have had a secret from my dear friend? But I was under a spell! Indeed, I was, dear Ora! Under a spell I could not break!"

"Never mind that now, darling. I am most interested in hearing about your marriage. You are married, you say?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Are you sure, Bevvie, that you are regularly, legally married?" anxiously questioned the heiress.

The girl raised her head and looked her patroness full in the face for a moment, and then, in her turn, inquired:

"What do you mean, Ora, dear?"

"Child, I do not wish to alarm you, but—I am so deeply anxious about you! Bevvie, darling, there have been such frauds as false marriages, by which unsus-

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pecting young girls have been betrayed. I hope that you are sure yours was not such a one."

"Oh, no, no, no; my marriage was regular, legal, though secret."

"Tell me all the particulars—when, where, by whom and to whom were you married, Bevvie?"

"On the 15th of last September, in the Church of St. Lucie, by Father Pierre Rouget, and to——" Here Bevvie paused.

"Yes—to whom?" inquired her friend.

"You will never, never tell! because you see it is a deep, deep secret. His secret more than mine. He made me promise never to divulge it, without his consent, and I gave him that promise, with one exception—in your favor, Ora! I told him that if, by any chance, you should ever question me on the subject, I should tell you the truth; for that I owed so much and much more to my best friend, Ora! And he agreed that I should, if necessary, tell you and only you, and only after binding you to secrecy."

"Well, I have promised to keep the secret. You say you can trust that promise; why, then, do you still kesitate to tell me the name of the man you have married?"

"I will do so no longer, dear Ora. He was—Fritz!" exclaimed Bevvie, as with an effort.

"Who!" demanded Ora, in unbounded astonishment.

"Fritz," replied Bevvie in a more subdued tone.

"What! The young German who was our persistent traveling companion? Who called himself Prince

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Frederick of Hohenfels, but whom every one called Fritz and believed to be a barber? Oh, my poor Bevvie!"

"Indeed he was no barber! Indeed he was what he represented himself to be! There was a German priest attached to the cathedral. He knew Fritz—had known him at Hohenfels and accredited him to Father Rouget. He was one of the witnesses of my marriage. He favored it, I do not know why! He gave me away, too, and he went into the vestry and signed the marriage register after us. And there in the parish register attached to the cathedral at Montreal, under the date of the 15th of September, 18—, you may see the marriage of Frederick Ernest of Hohenfels and Agnes Belvidera Boone, duly recorded and witnessed by Johann Muller and signed by Pierre Rouget."

"Then this seems to be quite right, except the secrecy; but why the secrecy, my dear Bevvie?"

"Oh! can you not guess? Because a prince is less free than a peasant in the choosing of a wife. He dares not offend the grand duke, his grandfather, upon whom he depends, for, you see, he is not the heir; his elder brother, Prince Rudolph, is the heir. But did you really think he was a barber, Ora?" suddenly inquired Bevvie.

"No, darling! I really never did. I at least could distinguish better than that. No; I felt and knew that he was a gentleman. Seriously, he impressed me very favorably."

"That is some comfort, dear Ora."

"Now tell me what possible opportunity there could

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have been for courtship or marriage between Fritz and you, when you and I have never been for a single day apart?" inquired the heiress.

"Dear Ora, if we have not been days we have been hours apart! Several hours of every day! Fritz was in our company for more than four months, and——"

"Yes; he was in our company, because the steamboats, stage coaches, railways and hotels were as free to him as to us, and we could not help it," put in the young lady.

"And besides, Ora, our friends, the Pendletons, liked to have him with us," added Bevvie.

"Yes, unfortunately!"

"Oh, do not say that, dear Ora! It is as if you cast some reflection upon him!"

"No; I did not mean to do so! Well, it seems that you were the attraction, Bevvie. Still, I do not see that there was so much opportunity for courtship."

"He was always my escort, remember, in all our sightseeing, and used even to drive me out in a gig, or attend me on a horseback ride—with your consent, Ora."

"Yes; I remember all that but too well! But you were such a mere child! Only sixteen years old, and so small! We all thought of you as a child, and talked of the kindness of Fritz to our little girl! Who could ever have thought that he, Prince Frederick of Hohenfels, would have fallen in love with such a child and won her heart, and persuaded her into a secret marriage?" mused Ora.

"Yet it was a marriage. A regular, legal marriage!

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Remember that, dear Ora! Be just to him. He never attempted to deceive me with a false marriage!" pleaded Bevvie.

"I give him all the credit he merits," dryly responded Miss Orkney. "He married you, you say, on the 15th of last September. Where was I that day?"

"Don't you know you went with the Pendletons to drive around the mountain and afterward visited the Convent of the Gray Nuns, and you were gone nearly all day?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And I said I did not wish to go. So you left me home, or rather at the St. Lawrence Hall; and Fritz took me to the Church of St. Lucie, where we were duly married."

"And afterward?"

"We were almost always together. You know he had become a recognized member of our traveling party. We all left Canada on the 1st of October. We traveled through New England and the Middle States, down finally to Richmond, where we arrived on the 20th of October. All this time we—my husband and myself—had frequent opportunities of meeting. He told me that he was obliged to sail for Havre, *en route* for Germany, on the 1st of November, but that he would write me by every mail and return to see me, perhaps to claim me, by the 1st of January. You know he parted with us on the day we left Richmond for this place. He went north, we south. And my heart, though half

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broken by the separation, was still hopeful for the coming reunion."

"Well, my dear Bevvie, though secret marriages are dangerous arrangements, yet in this case I see no cause for the deep despair that drove you to the very verge of madness and death. I do not, indeed," said the heiress.

"Oh, my dear Ora! If you knew! If you knew! I have never seen or heard from him, or of him, since we parted on the steamboat on the James River!" moaned the unhappy girl.

"Not heard from him since he went away?" anxiously exclaimed Ora.

"Not once!"

"Still—still that is no cause for despair——"

"Oh, yes!" hastily interrupted the poor girl; "for I see how it is. The grand duke has found out the marriage and has annulled it, with the high-handed dospotism exercised by Napoleon in the case of his brother. He has annulled our marriage, and Fritz does not dare to tell me."

"And if this is so, how could you continue to love or regret such a poltroon as that would make the young man out to be?" indignantly demanded Ora.

"Do not talk so, dear Ora. What could poor Fritz do, if his grandfather annulled his marriage?" pleaded Bevvie.

"Do!" exclaimed Ora. "He could be faithful to his wife, in spite of all the grand dukes and grandfathers on earth! He could come over to this country and turn barber in good earnest, if need were, for the sake of

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being true to his wife. And I do believe he would do it. Cheer up, Bevvie! He will come!"

"But he has never written to me, or at least I have had no letter from him since he went away."

"That is unfortunate, but no proof that he has forgotten his duty. Letters miscarry, sickness intervenes, ships are delayed at sea—a thousand contingencies may occur, and every one of them should be considered before you brand your lover-husband with infidelity," said Ora.

"I suppose I may have wronged him. I suppose I must have done so. But, oh, I have been so anxious, so intensely, terribly anxious to hear from him. That is what has maddened me and made me unjust to him."

"Cheer up! He will come by and by," said Ora, briskly.

"'By and by!' Oh, but in the meantime! In the meantime, Ora! If I might publish our marriage, I should not mind it so much. But I am pledged to keep it a secret from all but you. And what will people think of me, Ora?"

"I do not understand you, Bevvie. 'What will people think of you?' What should people think of you? Nothing at all, I should say, since, if your marriage is not known, it will not be talked about," replied Ora.

"Ah! you do not know! You do not know! You have not even imagined the root of my wo, of my despair!" wailed Bevvie.

No; Ora had not. She strongly disapproved of this secret marriage, the news of which had shocked and

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grieved her almost beyond endurance, yet in her great love for this erring child of passion she had restrained her feelings and forborne the least appearance of reproach. And now Bevvie, who had deeply pained her in the beginning, sorely perplexed her. What new trouble was she destined to hear! Still, for the unhappy girl's sake, she governed her emotions, and spoke gently:

"You must give me your whole confidence, dear Bevvie, if you want me to do you any good," she said.

Once more the impulsive girl threw herself sobbing into the arms of her protectress, and again Ora clasped her child closely to her bosom.

And there the deepest secret was told in a whisper.

It took a great deal to turn the current of blood in the veins of that strong, healthy and happy creature; but Ora's rosy face turned white as snow, and for the first time in her life she felt like swooning. She who, earlier in the evening, had dashed down the mountain path and snatched her child from under the hot breath of the rushing train, now almost succumbed to the pang of hearing the last secret that Bevvie had whispered into her ear. And yet no hint of reproach even now escaped in look or tone. She bent down and silently kissed the woful little face half hidden on her bosom.

"So you see you cannot help me. You can do nothing at all for me. Dear Ora, you had better have left me to my fate on the railway track!" moaned the miserable girl.

"Hush, hush, my dear; such words are wicked. I

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will help you. I am thinking—thinking," said the heiress gently.

"Don't, Ora, don't! I don't deserve that you should think for me—you whom I have deceived. Oh, dear Ora, I should have taken counsel with you before I took such a 'leap in the dark' as a secret marriage."

"Yes, dear, it was a 'leap in the dark.' But it is done and cannot be undone. Do not look back; let us look forward, and make the best of everything. Of course, under the circumstances, we must go away from here very soon."

"'We,' Ora, did you say 'we?' I know that I must certainly go; but you?"

"I must take you away, dear, and take care of you," said the heiress, simply as a mere matter of course.

"You, Ora! You take me away and care for me! Oh, my best, my only friend! my guardian angel!—for I will call you so! But oh, what will Auntie Mossop and Aunt Countie say? They will never let you go, Ora! They will think it so strange!" said Bevvie.

"No one can hinder me from going wherever I please, dear. I am of age; I am my own mistress, and I have ample means at my disposal. They will object, but they cannot hinder. Now, darling, go to bed and try to sleep. Leave all absolutely to me. I will manage for you," said Ora, stooping and pressing a fond kiss on the forehead of her troublesome child.

Bevvie unwound her clinging arms from around Ora's neck, and arose to leave the room.

"I will go with you," said Ora, rising from her chair.

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They went together to the pretty little white-draped back chamber adjoining Miss Orkney's.

The room was warm, though the wood fire had burned down to mere red coals; and the white bed was turned down, by the care of the negro woman who waited on these two girls.

Ora made her "child" undress and get into bed. Then she kissed her good night; set a wax taper on the mantel shelf and left the chamber, leaving the communicating door open between that and her own room.

CHAPTER V

ORA'S PLAN

Ora also went to bed; but with so much to think about she could not go to sleep.

How she deplored the weakness of the foolish girl with whose future she had burdened her own young life, and who had apparently made such shipwreck of that future!

For, hopeful as Ora Orkney's nature really was, she could but fear for the fate of Bevvie. The marriage, no doubt, had been contracted in good faith; all legal and religious forms had been duly observed. Frederick Charles was probably all that he claimed to be, although the Pendletons had called him Fritz, and affected, for a joke, to believe him to be a barber. But this joke

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had only been indulged in behind his back. To his face they had always been respectful. Besides, the young foreigner had been well received in the best society, not only in the United States—where a titled foreigner, real or counterfeit, finds such easy welcome—but in Canada, where a well authenticated passport to good company is required.

And more than all, to Ora's apprehension, were the strictly personal evidences of the young German's just claim to gentle if not noble blood. He had the form and features, the manner and appearance, and culture and speech of a gentleman.

But the higher his rank, the lower must be the hope of permanent or happy union between him and the obscure girl of his choice.

And here was another wonder to puzzle: Why should a German prince, even supposing him to be the younger son of a younger brother of the heir of a grand duchy about as big as a Virginia plantation, go so far below his rank to marry a young girl like Bevvie?

Bevvie was very pretty, with her petite form, tiny feet and hands, delicate features, cream-colored complexion, and night-black hair and eyes; but she could not be called beautiful, nor was she witty or "magnetic," or anything else but just pretty and good, so far as her fond friend who had known her from childhood could see.

There were dozens of young ladies whom Ora had seen in Prince Frederick's society who were much more attractive in society and eligible in position than this

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quiet, little, cream-colored girl with the dark eyes and hair.

Why, then, should Prince Frederick have descended to Bevvie? Even supposing this prince had been very poor, and very anxious to barter his title for riches, poor Bevvie had none to give him, nothing but the five thousand dollar legacy left her by the late General Orkney.

It was apparently, then, a disinterested love match between the young man of rank and the poor girl without a name—except those given in baptism—to which she had any right.

Would such a marriage, however regularly contracted, and however legal in this republic, be allowed to stand in that German grand duchy as big as a cotton field?

Probably not. And then what would become of Bevvie?

Ora could not answer that question.

But she saw plainly, or thought she saw, the duty immediately before her—to take Bevvie away and guard her from reproach.

And here was another difficulty: There was one person in the wide world that Ora loved, if possible, even more than she loved her child—that was her cousin, Conrad Orkney, a talented young lawyer, who had just been admitted to practice at the Richmond bar.

She had made his acquaintance on her first visit to Owlwood, when she had come from her convent, and he had come from his college, to spend the midsummer holidays at the mountain farmhouse.

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She was ten years old then, and he fifteen. And they had looked askance at each other, and secretly despised each other—Conrad, her, because she was not another boy; Ora, him, because he was not another girl; and they parted at the end of the holidays without the slightest regret on either side.

And during their subsequent vacations spent together at Owlwood Farm they made but slow progress toward mutual toleration.

It was, as I have said, when Ora was fifteen and Bevvie was ten years old, that this young lady first brought her adopted child to spend the midsummer holidays at Owlwood. That summer Conrad Orkney did not make his usual appearance at the farm. He was studying hard for his degree, he wrote, and so remained in town under a private tutor.

The cousins did not, in fact, meet again for three years, or until Ora was eighteen and Conrad twenty-three years of age, when they both arrived on the same day in July at the mountain farm.

They looked more askance at each other than ever, yet without any of their former mutual resentment.

One was now the beautiful, strong, healthful blonde we have described her to be, with blooming complexion, azure eyes, and sunny hair, and laughing face.

Conrad was now a tall, thin, graceful young man, with skin as dark as a Spanish gypsy's, dark eyes, dark hair and mustache, and a thoughtful, somber expression. He met his fair cousin with as much surprise and ad-

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miration as if he had never beheld her wondrous beauty before; but, indeed, when he had seen her last she had been but fourteen years of age, and still in fault for not being another fellow, and still also secretly at odds with him for his not being another girl; and so he had really not noticed whether she was dark or fair, pretty or plain.

Now he was struck and penetrated by her beauty, though he was much too proud and shy to show his admiration.

He saw Bevvie Boone, and heard for the first time, from his Aunt Mossop, the history of Bevvie's adoption by Ora.

He did not approve of this measure at all, and wondered greatly that his Uncle Orestes should have authorized and indorsed such folly by his will. Nor did he approve of Bevvie herself. No one knew, he argued, what her parents had been, what her inherited character and disposition would be. And he treated the little girl with bare toleration; yet, as he was not impolite, he left nothing to be complained of.

Ora was now strangely drawn toward this grave, dark cousin, who had been fatherless and motherless from his childhood, as she had been from her infancy; and perhaps Ora loved him before he really began to love her, as he soon did with all his soul.

This love must have been the attraction of opposition, for not only were they opposites in form and complexions, but in temperament and character; she a plump, blooming, joyous blond, and he a thin, sallow, melan-

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choly brunette; while she was warm, genial and confiding, he was cold, jealous and suspicious. They were kindred in only one thing besides their blood—they both had the very highest sense of honor.

They parted at the end of the holidays—he to go to Richmond to study law under an eminent jurist of that city, she to pursue her studies in her convent school.

He had asked permission to write to her, and she had given it, with the warning that every letter addressed to a pupil, or written by a pupil in the convent, was always read first by the lady superior.

"Then I do not care to write to you," replied Mr. Orkney; "not that my letters might not be read aloud in public by the town crier for anything objectionable that might be found in them, but it is not to be endured that they should pass under strangers' eyes before reaching yours."

"It is a necessary precaution in most cases, Conrad, and no exception can be made in our favor," urged Ora.

"Quite so; but, all the same, I do not care to write under the conditions," he concluded.

Ora was disappointed. She thought her cousin very proud; but, after all, she liked him rather better for being so.

Thus they parted, without any engagement, or any arrangement of any sort, yet with a clear mutual understanding and a definite hope of meeting again at Owlwood to spend the Christmas holidays.

And then and there they did meet again, and came to a better understanding, if possible, than they had be-

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fore; but still there was no positive marriage engagement between them.

And so they continued to spend every midsummer and Christmas vacation together at Owlwood Farm, and a sort of tacit engagement existed between them, though not a word of love or marriage had been spoken.

Not until the last Christmas holidays that they spent together at Owlwood Farm did Conrad venture to hint at his future hopes.

Then he was twenty-five and she twenty years old; and then not until they were about to part again did he do so.

"This will be your last term at the convent school, will it not, Ora?"

"Yes," she answered. "I shall attain my majority in June, and leave the school at the end of the month and of the term."

"And return here for good?"

"I suppose so."

"And I go back to apply for admittance to the Richmond bar. I am struggling to obtain position and the wealth it brings; when I have done so, or when I see a reasonable prospect of doing so, I shall venture to make you a proposal, Ora, that I am not free to utter now."

This was a cold-blooded declaration enough, so far as mere words expressed it, but the gaze of his dark eyes and the tones of his deep voice said so much more that Ora, in her frank, impulsive way, exclaimed:

"Oh! Conrad, I have enough for both of us, and more than enough!"

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"I am glad of that for your sake only, Ora, for I am not a fortune-hunter, but a poor man who must make his own way before he marries a wife. Therefore, while I breathe of my dearest hopes, I will not even tempt you into an engagement. Good-by."

And so they parted. Ora was so disappointed that she dropped her veil to hide her tears. She wanted to be positively engaged to this dark, proud man, and she wanted to marry him as soon as she should leave school. And this might have been arranged so if it had not been for his pride.

It was a year before they met again; for at midsummer, when Ora left school for good, Conrad was on his first circuit, and the knowledge of this fact had perhaps decided her to join that party of summer tourists among whom she had met the blonde German who had become the fate of Bevvie.

But they had corresponded from the day of her leaving her convent, up to the present time, and they had met at Owlwood during the last Christmas holidays, at the end of which he had returned to his law office in Richmond.

They had parted as before, with a perfect mutual understanding that they were to be, at some not far distant time, man and wife; but without any definite engagement.

This had been but little more than two months ago, and now Ora, lying awake on her bed and thinking over her plans for Bevvie's protection, thought, also, what Conrad Orkney would say to the course upon which

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she had decided. And as she reflected on his proud, jealous, suspicious nature, her heart sank within her bosom. She could not give him Bevvie's secret, and how could she explain her course to him without giving it? Or how could he, of all men, trust even her under such circumstances—trust in her without such explanation?

Finally she resolved to do what she considered her duty toward the girl whose fate was in her hands, and leave all the consequences to Providence.

And then, at length, Ora, who was the very best type of health in mind and body, ceased to toss from side to side, or to trouble herself about the future, and—despite doubts and fears—fell into a most refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER VI

A BOMBSHELL AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE

Owlwood Farmhouse, secure in its mountain fastness, had escaped all the ravages of the civil war.

Certainly, the boom of the cannon had been heard at Hall-in-Umbra, twenty miles off, on the day when the battle of Black Rock had been fought; but not at Owlwood.

Nor had the emancipation act made the slightest change in that

Remote, secluded, solitary, slow

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old homestead. Not a freedman or freedwoman had left the premises.

On the day when the proclamation had reached Owlwood, Mr. Elijah Mossop had called his people together and read it to them; but they could not make "head nor tail of it."

The religious negroes, hearing the name of the Lord mentioned, thought that then it was an order for them to encourage the reader by hearty responses of "Amen!" and "Glory!" while some of the less enthusiastic assented by exclaiming, "'Deed, it's de trufe!"

At the end of the reading the master explained to them that they were all now free—every man, woman and child on the place—free to go whenever and wherever they pleased.

This explanation puzzled them more than the proclamation had done. A buzz of troubled talk went through the crowd, and one old white-wooled negro, not overblessed with sense, piped out:

"Marse 'Lijah, me an' you is been on dis lan' man an' b'y ebber sence we was no more'n so high"—raising his hand about a foot from the ground—"let alone our farders an' gran'faders here long 'fo' we was, an' 'fo' de flood, too, I reckon!"

"'Deed, it's de trufe!" sang out an old woman.

But the white-haired black patriarch went on unheeding the interruption:

"An' now, Marse 'Lijah, wot I want to ax yer is dis: Is I 'bleeged to git up an' go 'way offen dis place, in de anshant ole ages ob my pilg'imidge?"

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"You can stay if you like," curtly replied Mr. Mossop, for the usually amiable old gentleman was in a very bad humor that day. "You can, any or all of you, stay here if you please, and I shall be better pleased if you do, of course," he added, in a kinder tone, as he saw the troubled looks of his people. "Still, I am bound to make you all understand that if you do stay, it must be your own free will—for you are absolutely free to go when and where you please—much freer than I am, who have to stay here and take care of the farm and family," he concluded, as he folded the newspaper he had been reading, put it in his pocket, and walked into the house.

Still the colored people of Owlwood were sorely perplexed. They knew nothing of the new era that was so familiar to the negroes in the great valley, on the plains, or near the towns and cities.

Some of them seemed to suspect that 'mancipation was some sort of "catching complaint" that had broken out among "the darkies," and that their master feared they might take it and give it to the white folks in the big house.

They did not leave the farm, not one of them. They did not, in fact, know how to go, or where to go.

They had a very kind master and a very easy time.

Master and servants having all been born in that state of life in which they found themselves, knew no other; and this was to be said of them, that the master was as good to his servants in their station as he was to his children in theirs.

So the colored people stayed at Owlwood and every-

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thing went on as before. And so great was the force of habit that the master forgot that his people were only servants and not property, and they forgot that their master was only their employer and not their owner.

Mr. Mossop would certainly have found it much cheaper to have hired the most able-bodied of the men and women as farm and house servants, to have paid them fair wages and to have left them to support their aged, their sick, and their children.

But somehow or other he could not get out of the old ruts, but went on as before, providing all his people alike with houses and gardens, furniture and implements, food, clothing, fuel, medicine and medical attendance, and, in fact, with all the necessaries and comforts of life suitable to their station, besides occasional presents of pocket money when he had it to give, for there were times when money was about the rarest article to be seen at Owlwood.

Old 'Lijah Mossop, though he had scrupulously informed his people of their freedom to go, was very glad that they had stayed. He could not bear the thought of parting with one of them, not even with any of the perfectly useless, and when he read in his one great paper of the hordes of freedmen and freedwomen continually deserting the plantations of the plains, and pouring into the large Eastern cities, where so many of them fell into poverty, vice and crime, his heart sank within him, and if in his subsequent policy toward his people he was a diplomat and selfish, it was with a perfectly unconscious diplomacy and selfishness.

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But he wished to warn, if not to terrify them from leaving him.

Never was a negro murderer executed in any city that Mr. Mossop did not call all his people together, and "harrow up their souls" by reading from his great New York paper the full account of the killing and the hanging, with all the heart-sickening details, generally winding up by saying:

"Now, you see, boys, that Tom Wright" (or Henry Jenkins, or whover it might have been) "was a perfectly steady and well-conducted lad until he left his country home and friends, and went to seek his fortunes in Babylon the Great among strangers, when he fell into bad hands and got himself hanged, and might have been innocent all the time, poor fellow."

"Amen!"

"Glory!"

"'Deed it's de trufe," ejaculated the edified hearers, making their usual responses.

"All the same, boys, you are every one of you free to go and try it for yourselves, if you like. I have no right to stop you. Only you had better think twice first," he would say in conclusion.

"You hears it good now!"

"'Deed it's de trufe!"

"Glory!"

"Amen!" came the responses, as the old master, satisfied with the impression he had given of the perils of the outside world, would triumphantly demand:

"Now tell me, boys, did any of you ever hear, in all

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your lives, of any colored man ever being hanged in all these parts?"

"Nary singly one, Marse 'Lijah!" called out the black and white patriarch before mentioned.

"So if any of you want to be hanged, you will have to leave this and go to Babylon. And as I have said before, you are all free to go where you like. Nobody has the right to stop you; only I repeat, you had better think twice about it."

"Jes' so, old Marse!"

"'Deed it's de trufe!"

"Glory!"

"Amen!"

And so on.

And as scarcely a week passed in these days without the report of an execution in some city, with some poor negro as the victim, and as these reports were always read to their freedmen on the farm, and nothing else from the papers was read to them, it followed that they all became convinced that to set out to seek their fortunes would be to find the gallows at the end of their journey.

And it may be added in defense of their master, that he had sincerely adopted the same opinion.

When, at length, old Elijah Mossop, full of years and honors, passed to his eternal home, he was as deeply mourned by his people as by his family; but his departure made no difference in the routine of Owlwood. The colored people continued to serve the mistress as affectionately as they had served the master.

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On the morning succeeding the night when Bevvie Boone had been rescued from death by Ora Orkney, and had afterward made her strange and startling confession to her deliverer, the breakfast table at Owlwood presented a very cheerful and attractive appearance.

It stood in the family sitting room, in the southeast corner of the house.

The March winds were blowing boisterously outside, but the morning sun shone warmly in at the east windows, from which the blue paper blinds were half rolled up. There was a bright wood fire burning in the open chimney, and a blue and gray striped domestic carpet on the floor. There were several fine engravings, mostly of a religious character, on the whitewashed walls, and a long, low mirror over the white painted mantel shelf.

A gray parrot in a large cage on one of the sunny window-sills shrieked:

"Come to breakfast! Come—come—come—come to breakfast!" as he always shrieked whenever the table was set, no matter what meal might be afoot. There was also a large gray cat asleep on the rug before the fire; but there was not another living creature in the room, until the door from the hall opened and Mrs. Mossop and her sister, Miss Constantia Orkney, commonly called Miss Countie, came in together.

These women were perfect contrasts to each other, in person, if not in character.

Mrs. Mary Mossop, the eldest sister of the late General Orestes Orkney, and the widow of the late Mr.

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Elijah Mossop, of Owlwood, was a woman of about sixty years of age, below the medium height, with a fat, fresh, rosy face, and such a rotund form that her particular friends used to say that she looked like a feather bed tied in the middle. Being in mourning for her husband, she wore a black calico gown made in the old-fashioned way, with a round body, short waist, and full skirt; also an old style cap of white book-muslin, with full borders, tied under her chin, and a large white handkerchief folded over her chest.

She was religious and affectionate, a good mistress and a good manager.

Miss Constantia Orkney was a single lady, fifty-eight years of age, tall, stout, muscular, with large but regular features; dark complexion, black eyes and black hair streaked with gray. She wore her front hair parted evenly above her high forehead, and brought down and twisted into two flat rings on her temples, and her back hair plaited and wound around a high tortoise-shell comb on the top of her head. She wore no cap; maiden ladies, no matter how old, never did so in her neighborhood. She wore a plain black alpaca dress, with no addition except a white linen collar and a pair of cuffs.

Miss Countie, with her imposing figure, high nose and self-possessed manner, might have been taken for the autocrat of the family, and was really feared by some of them, but she was, in fact, one of the most inoffensive of women.

"It's seven o'clock. Whey—whey—whey are the

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girls, Countie?" inquired Mrs. Mossop, as she took up a hand-bell and rang it sharply.

"I haven't seen 'em this morning, but I hear Oresta walking about in her room overhead now. I reckon they will be down soon! Ah! here they come now!" replied Mrs. Orkney, as the sound of a door opening above, followed by a rush of hurrying feet down the stairs, was heard.

It was only Ora, who entered hastily, apologizing for being late by saying that she had overslept herself.

"And whey's Bevvie?" inquired Mrs. Mossop.

"Bevvie is not well, and I would not let her get up. I will take her some tea and toast presently."

"Belvidera has not been looking well for some time past. Squire Goodwin was saying so the very last time he called here, and telling us that we ought to send for a doctor," said Miss Countie.

"Yes; telling us we ought to send for a doctor," added Mrs. Mossop, who always echoed or emphasized her sister's remarks.

"Oh, nonsense about sending for a doctor for Bevvie!" exclaimed Ora, who always put down everybody who displeased her, especially her venerable aunts. "Send for a doctor, indeed! I would like to catch you at it. Old Mr. Theophilus Goodwin is always fancying people are ill. Bevvie wants a change of air, and so do I. And so we are going away next week," announced Ora, as she took her place at the breakfast table, where both the elder ladies had seated themselves, and on which a

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negro girl had just placed the coffee, buckwheat cakes, and broiled chickens.

"What did you say, Oresta?" inquired Miss Countie, as she passed a cup of coffee to her niece, for really she had not believed the testimony of her own ears.

"Ye-ye-yes! What did you say, Ora?" inquired Mrs. Mossop, following suit.

"I say, aunty, that I am going on a little trip, and I shall take Bevvie along with me for company."

"On a trip? You? Where to? To see your friends, the Pendletons?" demanded Miss Countie.

"To see the Pendletons?" added Mrs. Mossop.

"No, aunty. I think I shall go from here straight on to——"

Here the thunder of the morning express and the reverberating echo of the mountains deafened everybody for about five minutes. The old ladies held their hands to their ears, while their faces were knotted up with pain.

"Them derned railroad trains! They—they—they sound just like old Satan and all his imps coming howling up the valley. They'll kill somebody some of these days. See if they don't," complained Mrs. Mossop, as soon as the cessation of the uproar allowed her to speak.

"The noise is enough to kill anybody without anything else. Just look at Oresta. She is as white as a sheet," added Miss Countie.

"As white as a sheet!" echoed Mrs. Mossop.

Ora's face, indeed, was without a vestigate of color, but it was not the noise of the train; it was the memory,

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of last night's appalling adventure called up by the sound.

"Where did you say you were going, Oresta?" inquired Miss Countie, reverting to the previous question.

"First to Washington, thence on to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Portland, and perhaps Halifax."

Miss Countie gasped for breath before her niece had got through the bread-roll.

"Who's going with you?" at length demanded the spinster.

As to Mrs. Mossop, she was struck so speechless with amazement that she could not even echo her sister, but sat with her mouth open and stared.

"I think, I think," said Ora, diplomatically, "that I shall take Bevvie."

"Of course you always take Belvidera everywhere. But who else is going with you?"

"No one but Bevvie."

"No one but Belvidera! Have you taken leave of your senses, Oresta? Don't you know that you, a young lady, cannot go traveling around the country with no one but a child in your company?"

"I know, aunty, that I can, and I will—meaning no disrespect to you, however."

"You can and will?" exclaimed Miss Countie.

"Yes, aunty."

"Go traveling all over the country with no one but a little girl?"

"Yes, aunty."

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"Well, then, miss, let me assure you that you cannot be allowed to do so! My sister and myself stand in the place of your parents. I am your guardian. We shall exercise our authority," said Miss Countie.

"Ye—ye—ye—yes! We must exercise our au—au—au—au——" spluttered Mrs. Mossop, and then she broke down and cried.

Ora laughed and then stopped compunctiously, and said:

"Why, you dear good aunties, you have no authority to exercise! I am over twenty-one years old. I am my own mistress, and may go wherever I please, and do whatever I like, so that I do not break the laws of the land."

"But you'll never go traveling all over the country with no better protection than a half-grown girl!" said Miss Countie, coming down at once from her high horse on recognizing the truth of Ora's words.

"Indeed, but I shall," replied Ora.

"Oh! if—if—if—if poor 'Lijah was only alive! He could keep her in order!" whimpered Mrs. Mossop.

"I doubt it. He never did!" replied Miss Countie, dryly. Then turning to her niece, she inquired: "When do you think of going on this wild goose chase, Oresta?"

"On Wednesday of next week," replied Ora.

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CHAPTER VII

ORA'S TRIAL

When hope is dead within the heart,
By secret sorrow long concealed,
We shrink lest looks or words impart
What must not be revealed!

'Tis hard to smile when we would weep,
To talk when we would silent be,
To wake when one would wish to sleep,
And wake to agony.

Yes, angels wait their charge to meet,
Where pain and sorrow cannot come;
And angels with unerring feet
Will guide their wanderer home.

—ANNE HUNT.

"GOING 'way on Wednesday o' next week!" echoed Mrs. Mossop, who, perhaps from constant association with the colored folks on the farm from her infancy up, had contracted their habit of chopping short her words. "Never heerd of such a thing in all the days of my life; and what on eerth will Conrad Orkney think of it?"

"Yes, Oresta," solemnly inquired Miss Countie, for once taking the cue from her sister, "what will Conrad Orkney think of such a highly improper proceeding?"

Ora drew a deep breath, but did not reply.

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"I think he should be consulted before such an extraordinary step is taken by you," added Miss Countie.

"Yes; before such an extr'or'nary step is taken," repeated Mrs. Mossop.

"I do not see why my Cousin Conrad should have any voice in the matter," replied Ora, after another deep breath.

"Why, ain't he just as good as your husband?" demanded Mrs. Mossop.

"I do not understand you Aunt Molly," said Ora, crimsoning.

"Why, ain't you two as good as married?" persisted Mrs. Mossop.

"Indeed, Aunt Mossop, you talk so strangely that I cannot answer you," said Ora, indignantly.

"You're 'gaged to him! That's what I mean! You're 'gaged to be married to him! And when a gentleman and lady is 'gaged to be married to one another, it is as binding unto both on 'em all the same as if they was husband and wife. Leastways that's my opinion."

"Aunt Molly, I am not engaged to Cousin Conrad."

"What! Have you broke off with him? Well, Ory, I always knowed you was one of the willfullest limbs I ever saw, but I didn't think you was that willful as to break off 'long o' Conrad!" sighed Mrs. Mossop.

"I have not broken off with him. I was never in with him. You are all very much mistaken."

"Do you mean to say, Oresta, that you are not and never have been engaged to Conrad?" solemnly inquired Miss Countie.

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"That is what I mean to say, aunt."

"Then you rejected him!" exclaimed Miss Countie.

"'Ejected him,'" echoed Mrs. Mossop.

"No; I never did! He never gave me the chance, aunties," replied Ora, with half a smile and half a sigh.

"Never asked you to marry him!" exclaimed both old ladies in astonishment.

"Never paid me that crowning compliment, I assure you," said Ora, laughing.

"Well, then, I think it very strange that he has not done so—very strange indeed," said Miss Countie.

"'Ve'y strange,'" echoed Mrs. Mossop.

"After all his attentions to you for so many years, too!" exclaimed Miss Countie.

"Yes; after all that!" assented Mrs. Mossop.

"All the neighborhood think that you have been engaged for ever so many years," continued Miss Countie.

"Ever so many years!" echoed Mrs. Mossop.

"Good gracious, aunties. What do you mean by ever so many years? I am not as old as Methuselah! I am only twenty-one," laughed Ora.

"Well, ever since you were seventeen or eighteen, anyhow! And here was Squire Goodwin on here only the other day congratulating us on the coming marriage in the family, and asking us when it was to be!" said Miss Countie.

"Yes! that he did! Asked us when it was to be!" added Mrs. Mossop.

"Oh, Squire Goodwin again! When he is not fancy-

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ing people to be ill and wanting them to be doctored, he is fancying them engaged and wanting them to be married! He is an old quiz, your Squire Goodwin!" said Ora, rising from the table, for she had finished her breakfast.

"But all the neighbors think that you and Conrad are engaged, and if you are not, I think you ought to be, after all your company keeping," said Miss Countie.

"Com-com-company-keeping!" stammered Mrs. Mossop.

"See here, aunties," said Ora, with the frankness which distinguished her when only her own affairs were in question—"though Conrad and myself are not literally engaged, yet we understand each other perfectly; and though he has never asked me to marry him, yet I know that he will do so as soon as his income will justify him in taking a wife."

"He has told you that much, then, Oresta?" said Miss Countie.

"Yes."

"And you did not discourage him?"

"No."

"Then I should call that an engagement," said Miss Countie.

"Yes, an engagement," parroted Mrs. Mossop.

"No! he distinctly told me that he would not hold me bound by any engagement, but as soon as he should be in circumstances to justify such a step, he should make a proposal to me."

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"Did he mean as soon as he should be making money?" inquired Miss Countie.

"Yes," replied Ora.

"What has that got to do with it? You have money enough for two—yes! for twenty," said Miss Countie.

"Yes; for twent-twent-twenty," stammered Mrs. Mossop.

"But Conrad scorns to be thought a fortune-hunter, aunties; and so he will never ask me to wed him until he has an income sufficient to support a family," replied Ora.

"My dear Oresta, if you should persist in going upon this harum-scarum, wild goose chase of yours, believe me that Conrad Orkney will never ask you to be his wife," said Miss Countie, solemnly.

"Never ask you to be his wife," echoed Mrs. Mossop, shaking her head.

"My dear aunties, why do you say that?" inquired Ora, with a troubled look.

"Because Conrad Orkney has the finest sense of female propriety, and——"

"Aunt Countie," interrupted Ora, flushing brightly, "don't say 'female.' I hate that word! I had as lief be called a—pig as a female! And as to 'propriety,' I don't see what that has to do with my journey."

"Nor I either, my dear!" exclaimed Miss Countie, catching her up adroitly. "Certainly I do not see that propriety has anything to do with your proposed proceeding, which is a manifest impropriety."

"I am going to take a cup of hot tea up to Bevvie!"

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'said Ora, suddenly flouncing out of the room and into the kitchen to do her errand.

"She must not be allowed to go on this trip," said Miss Countie, positively.

"Not 'low—'low—'lowed to go on this trip," assented Mrs. Mossop.

"We must take means to prevent her from making such a fool of herself."

"From making such a foo—foo—fool of herself."

More easily said than done, this.

Ora went about preparing for her journey as if nothing had been urged against it, but she put a guard upon her tongue, and did not allow it to retort to any of the sharp, severe, insulting remarks made by her aunties, "all for her own good."

For instance, when Miss Countie said:

"Oresta, if you persist in taking this journey alone, or with no companion but a half-grown girl like Agnes Belvidera with you, really I could not blame my sister if she were to refuse to receive you here again!"

Ora replied:

"My dear auntie, I have had my own way all the days of my life, and I should not want to live if I could not always have it! But I don't mean to compromise your respectability by eccentricities. I have already written to my tenant in Hall-in-Umbra, to let him know that I shall not renew his lease, as I intend to take possession of the house as soon as that lease expires."

Miss Countie was aghast! Mrs. Mossop speechless!

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"What! you—you—you going to live alone at Hall-in-Umbra!" exclaimed Miss Countie.

"Oh, no, not alone. Bevvie will be with me; and also all the servants who have not contrabanded themselves off to the cities of the plains and got themselves hanged. They have had no orator at Hall-in-Umbra, like Uncle Mossop, to keep them in order, you know!"

"Oresta! you are my brother's orphan child, but if you keep up your resolution, I shall have to give you up!" said Miss Countie, with awful solemnity.

"I should be very sorry to be given up by you, auntie; but—but—I must go my own way! 'Give me liberty or give me death!' you know!"

"Oh, if 'Lijah was only 'live!" moaned Mrs. Mossop, wiping her eyes. "If po' 'Lijah was only 'live, he—he—he—he'd lay down the law to her."

"He might as well read the riot act to a thunderstorm!" said Miss Countie, indignantly. "Don't you see the girl is bent on her own ruin? She ought to be shut up in a mad-house—that is what ought to be done with her."

Poor Mrs. Mossop whimpered. She was really too soft-hearted to echo such a very cruel opinion as this, even when it was uttered by her infallible sister.

And through all this Ora went steadily on with her preparations for departure.

When Sunday came, Ora went to All Saints' Church with her aunties.

Bevvie, truly pleading indisposition, stayed at home.

The sermon happened to be on the fifth command-

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ment, and the preacher exhorted his congregation upon the duty of rendering honor and obedience not only to parents but to pastors and "all others in authority."

Ora happened to sit between her two aunts, and each of them, from time to time, called their niece's attention to certain parts of the discourse in a manner that was more pointed than pleasant—by digging their elbows into her ribs—which had no other effect than the rendering her tender flesh rather black and blue.

When the three were seated together in their old carriole, and on their way home, Ora said:

"My dear aunties, I really cannot sit here quietly under the reproach of having broken the fifth or any other commandment of our Lord. I try to keep them all, both in the letter and the spirit. I do honor my father and mother in heaven, and I obey all whom the Lord has placed in authority over me; but you are not among these, dear aunties, and though I am bound to love and respect you, I am not bound to obey you. Now, pray, let the controversy between us stop just here and now."

And it did stop there and then, Miss Countie saying to herself, and then to her sister, that they could not, with a vestige of self-respect, keep up a dispute in which they were always worsted by that misguided girl, nor could they continue to "lay down the law" that they had no power to enforce.

So not another word of remonstrance was uttered.

Bevvie, who had not been present at any of these scenes between aunts and niece, still discovered, divined,

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or inferred enough to know that the two old ladies so deeply disapproved of their niece's journey as to be on the very point of renouncing her should she undertake it; and the poor girl was deeply troubled on account of her benefactress.

One day when Ora entered her own room and dropped, sobbing, into her arm chair, poor Bevvie, hearing her, came out of the adjoining chamber, kneeled down beside her, her only friend, and laying her little black head on the young lady's lap, murmured forth her pathetic little petition.

"Dear Ora, your plan—going away—shocks all your friends so much. Please, Ora, let me go alone. Send me away, dear, by myself."

"I would see Owlwood, and all the owls in it, at the bottom of the Umbra first. Why, you poor, dear, helpless child, I would not abandon you for any fear, or any hope, or any good in this lower world!" replied Ora, stooping and pressing her lips upon the curly black head on her lap.

"But—Mr. Conrad Orkney?" softly suggested Bevvie.

Ora shrank and shivered for a moment, and then answered:

"If in all these years he has not learned my nature too well to misunderstand me or misconstrue my conduct, it were better that he and I should never meet again!"

"And I to be the cause of your parting! Oh, Ora, my best and dearest friend!—my only true and faith-

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ful friend! how much trouble I have caused you, and must still cause you, unless you let me go!" moaned Bevvie.

"Hush, my darling. Say not another word on this subject. I love you, Bevvie. My care of you is a work of love as pure and sacred as any mother's love for her child. Your sorrow and helplessness binds you closer, makes you dearer to me than before. It would be misery for me to lose you, or to see you suffer, Bevvie. It will be happiness for me to take care of you, and make you comfortable and contented," said Ora, running her fingers fondly through the girl's dark curls.

"Bless you, bless you, Ora! Oh! what can I ever render to you for all your goodness to me!" murmured Bevvie.

"Try to be as good, as hopeful, and as happy as you can," said Ora.

"What were you crying about when I came in just now, dear? Do you mind telling me?" tenderly inquired Bevvie.

"Oh, nothing very special. I hate to be at odds with any one, Bevvie, especially with these dear old aunties," replied Ora, with what was now a frequent style of hers, half a smile and half a sigh.

"And all for me—for worthless me! You go for my sake! You give no explanation, but you keep silence for my sake! You shock and estrange all your kindred for my good-for-nothing sake!"

"Hush, Bevvie. Hush, darling. You shall not talk so. I do what I do because I cannot help doing so,

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dear. I love you more than all the old aunties in the wide world, and you need me a thousand times more than they do. Besides, I am responsible for your well-being. In going with you and taking care of you I am in the plain path of duty. That would make me strong even if love did not. Now see. Duty gives me strength for this task, and love gives me pleasure in it. Now, then! No more moping. Finish your packing. This is Tuesday noon, and

> Laugh those who can, weep those who may,
> Southward we march by break of day,"

said Ora, gayly, as she rose and lifted Bevvie up.

That same day their luggage was dispatched to the railway station five miles off, by means of a cart, horse and servant that belonged to Miss Ora Orkney.

And long before sunrise the next morning the same cart, horse and servant stood before Owlwood Farm-house, waiting to convey the two young ladies to the same railway station.

When they had finished their very early breakfast, Ora went to take leave of her aunts, who were also at the table.

"Good-by, dear Aunt Mossop. I do thank you very much for all your goodness to me, and I do beg you to forgive all my waywardness toward you," she said, throwing her arms around the fat neck of the old lady.

"Ef you'd only alter your mind and stop now, Ory, chi—chi—child!" sobbed Mrs. Mossop.

"Dear, dearest, good auntie, I would if I could; but

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I cannot stop. I must go my own way or die," replied Ora, kissing her fondly.

"Let her go, then," exclaimed Miss Countie. "We shall never see her again, that is one thing. And if we ever hear of her again, it will be from some lunatic asylum or public hospital."

"Oh, auntie, what a cruel valedictory. But good-by, dear Aunt Countie. You shall hear only good news of me, and shall see me again soon, please the Lord," said Ora, putting her arms around Miss Countie's stiff neck, and kissing her hard, dark cheek.

Meantime Bevvie had taken leave of Mrs. Mossop, and turned to bid adieu to Miss Orkney.

"Good-by, you poor child. Sorry enough am I to see you hauled off by that willful niece of ours. And I tell you now that if you would like to stop you can do so. You are not obliged to go with her," said Miss Countie.

"I would follow my lady around the world," briefly replied Bevvie.

And they went into the dark morning together.

Their humble conveyance awaited them.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW LIFE

"THIS is the only sort of carriage I have at my command. These happen to be mine. They brought some

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things from Hall-in-Umbra when the place was let, and they have been here ever since," said Ora, as she climbed into the cart and held out her hand to help Bevvie.

"Do you mean this cart and horse?" inquired the latter.

"I mean cart, horse and driver," laughed Ora, as she settled her companion beside her. "And, by the way, Pepper, have you had a good breakfast?" she inquired, bending toward her darky "coachman."

"Oh, yes, miss; thanky, miss," replied the man, touching his hat.

"And the horse?"

"Oh, he's all right miss. Thanky, miss!" with another touch above.

"Then make as good time as you can, or we shall miss the train. Yes; and have to spend the day in that kennel they call the station, and then take the night express. Now, Bevvie, doesn't it seem absurd, dear, that these railway trains thunder past our house four times a day, shaking the mountains down around our ears, or seeming to do so, and never stopping, no, not if it were a matter of life and death, until they get to this cow-shed, when they pause just twenty seconds to take up any passenger, luggage, or mail bag that may happen to hit their time?"

Bevvie only answered by a smile.

The dusky coachman said:

"I calls it onlawful, miss! Onlawful."

Ora laughed merrily; for this "onlawful" was a favorite word with old Pepper, and freely applied to

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everything he or his friends found to be disagreeable, from sheep stealing to tax collecting.

The next moment there was a heavy jolt and a violent rocking of the cart from side to side as it turned a sharp point and rattled down a steep declivity.

Ora threw her arms around Bevvie, clasped her close, and exclaimed:

"Mind what you are about, Pepper. Every time we go down this road by noonday we take our lives in our hands, and to attempt it in the gray of dawn is even much more dangerous."

"All right, miss! Thanky, miss! We's down de Debbel's Staircase now, miss," said the driver, as the cart struck with a rebound the foot of the road.

"Devil's Staircase" was the attractive name of that particular spot.

After a series of ups and downs that would have been called "hairbreadth 'scapes" by any one not so well accustomed to them as was Ora and her companions, they reached what used to be called the river road, which lay between the base of the mountains and the bank of the Umbra, but it was now the railroad, with very little space to spare on each side of the iron tracks.

"This used to be so safe! And now it is even more perilous than the pass! What if there should be a train coming or going just as we get to some narrow strip! We should have to make for the river as the safest place!" said Ora.

"I calls it onlawful, miss! that's wot I calls it, onlawful!" said old Pepper, with much emphasis.

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But the road, barring the perils of the passing trains, was a good road to travel. They made fast time on it, and soon arrived at the dreary shanty which served as the "depot," and which was two miles from the nearest human habitation.

One lonely young man did duty as station master, ticket clerk, express agent and telegraph operator, and was on duty day and night, sleeping in the shanty when there was time to sleep.

They had twenty minutes to wait, which they passed in the cart rather than in the close little station (which was heated by a large red hot, rusty iron stove), and into which Ora sent Pepper to buy their tickets.

They sat and watched the dawn reddening over the cedar-capped summit of the Eastern ridge, until the sound of the approaching train was heard—humming, rising, rushing, thundering along the narrow valley until it roused all the mountain echoes into an uproar deafening and appalling.

"It is onlawful—that's wot it is! It is onlawful!" said Pepper, holding his hands to his ears.

The two girls left the cart and stood on the rude platform, ready to get on board as soon as the train should stop, for it only paused half a minute for passengers, luggage, mail bag, or anything else that might be on hand, for this branch was just a tender and, as it were, a servant of the great Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

"Here, Pepper! here is a present for you! Happily, you will go home by daylight! Better wait until

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the up train passes, however, and then the road will be clear until the afternoon. Good-by! Give my love to all at home!" said Ora, pressing a five dollar bill into the hand of the man, and then finding herself swung rather swiftly on the train by the conductor, who had already lifted Bevvie into her seat, while mail bags and luggage were being tossed on the baggage car, and the train started before slow Old Pepper could touch his hat or thank his young mistress for her parting gift. The old man held his ears with his broad palms until the thunder of the train died away in the distance, and then he slowly shook his head and muttered:

"It's onlawful! the whole on it! Onlawful! Dey's got the railroad here now, and by and by dey'll have jails and galluses and fings as never was heerd on in dese parts afore, and only belongs to de wicked cities! Jes as ole marse used to say! But lor's! we haddent no call to go to de cities arter de wickedness! De wickedness is coming right here to we—by railroad, too!"

So saying, Pepper mounted to his seat on the cart and lighted his pipe to sit and smoke until the up train should pass and leave the road clear for him to drive home with an easy mind.

Meanwhile Ora and Bevvie were whirled on at the rate of thirty miles an hour by the down train.

No need to follow every mile of their way on this journey.

In consideration of Bevvie's delicate health, Ora declined to travel at night, but got off the train with her companion at whatever town or village they might hap-

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pen to reach anywhere between sunset and ten o'clock, and after a supper, a night's rest and a breakfast, they would take the next passing train on their route.

Their last stopping place was Harper's Ferry, where they stayed two days to enjoy the sublime mountain and river scenery, and on the third day they took the train for Washington City, where they arrived late in the afternoon.

It was not their first visit to the capital. They had taken it on their return trip from Richmond to Owlwood.

They stopped now, however, at a different and much plainer hotel, at some distance from the grand house which had been their temporary abode on that former occasion.

They did not register their names, but Ora took their rooms in the name of Miss Orkney and paid a week's board in advance for herself and companion.

She and her protégé were still in deep mourning for the late Mr. Mossop, and despite their youth and unprotected state, they both presented an eminently orthodox and respectable appearance. The most suspicious citizen of the world could never have mistaken them for anything but what they were—modest and reputable young women.

After a few hours' rest to recover from the fatigues of their long journey, Ora, with the advertising sheet of the morning paper in her hand, took a carriage and, with Bevvie for her companion, went house hunting.

"I know exactly the sort of home I want—a new or

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at least a purely clean, little, six-roomed cottage, with a bit of flower garden in front and a bit of back yard behind—one that I can furnish cheaply with brand new and, therefore, clean furniture. I do not care in what part of the city it is, so that it is not in a crowded street. And, as Congress has adjourned since the fourth of March, and the city is half empty, houses of all sorts must be empty," said Ora, as they drove down Seventh Street.

"Do you think the presence or absence of Congress makes much difference in the number of small unfurnished houses?" pointedly inquired Bevvie.

"Well, no; on second thought, it cannot do so," replied Ora.

Their quest was soon and luckily over. They had driven quite to the southern extremity of Seventh Street, and had turned east, along the banks of the Potomac, when they came to a row of detached, white, framed, two-storied cottages, each standing in its own little garden, where apple, peach and cherry trees were already bursting into pink, white, parti-colored blossoms, and where lilac bushes and other spring shrubs already scented the air with their delicious fragrance. There were five of these cottages, all evidently tenanted except the middle one, whose green door bore a white paper card bearing the notice in large letters—"To let."

"Stop. Draw up here," said Ora.

And when the carriage stood still she got out, followed by Bevvie, opened the little green gate, went up the narrow gravel walk between rows of lilac and rose

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bushes and stepped upon the small portico before the door.

Bevvie immediately sat down on one of the two benches that stood opposite each other on either side the door, while Ora examined the card more attentively, and read again "To let," and below these words the line, "Inquire next door."

"Which next door, I wonder? There is one on each side," exclaimed Ora with her merry laugh.

"This way, ma'am, if you please," called a voice from the garden on the west side, and Ora, turning, saw an elderly woman approaching the partition fence.

Ora went to meet her.

"You were looking at the house," said the stranger.

"Yes; and if the inside pleases me as well as the outside, and the rent is reasonable, I should like to take it," replied the young lady.

"I'll come around in a minute, ma'am, with the key," said the woman, as she turned and re-entered her own house.

"Here is a fine view of the river, Bevvie. It expands here so that one might almost imagine we were looking out to sea."

"It is the junction of the Anacostia and the Potomac that makes this expanse, is it not?"

"Yes; I suppose so. Here comes our new friend," answered Ora, as the stranger entered the gate.

The new-comer unlocked the door, and admitted the visitors into a narrow but daintily clean hall, with a staircase rising on the left hand side, and three doors,

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leading into a parlor, dining-room and kitchen on the right hand side.

These were first exhibited and approved; then the neatly kept back yard and out-houses; and then the inspectors were led up stairs to look into three bedrooms in a row from front to back, one over the parlor, one over the dining-room, and one over the kitchen, and a bath-room over the scullery. Everything was freshly scoured, painted and whitewashed, and was as neat and clean as it was possible to be.

Just big enough for you and me and one servant, Bevvie, and not a bit to spare. We cannot entertain company here," laughed Ora.

"No," gravely assented her companion.

"Your sister, ma'am, I suppose?" said the house-shower.

"My daughter," solemnly replied Ora, amused at the look of amazement and incredulity that followed her speech. The woman looked from one young girl to the other, and then smiled with a sudden mental illumination, and exclaimed:

"Oh, to be sure! Your step-daughter, of course, ma'am."

Miss Orkney did not contradict nor explain, but inquired:

"What is the rent of this house?"

"Fifteen dollars a month, ma'am."

"Who has the letting of it?"

"Mr. Abel, the upholsterer, on Thirteenth Street, ma'am. I'll give you his business card. I always come

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provided with one in my pocket when I show the house," said the exhibitor, drawing forth the paper and presenting it to the inquirer.

"This will save a great deal of trouble," said Ora, "for now I can rent the cottage and order the furniture from my landlord at the same time."

Then she bade adieu to her new acquaintance, re-entered her carriage, followed by Bevvie, and passed the card to the coachman, saying:

"Drive to that address.

Twenty minutes brought them to the establishment of the upholsterer.

Ora inquired for Mr. Abel, and was conducted through the show rooms, where various sets of furniture were on exhibition, to a little railed-off part at the rear, where, at the desk, sat the proprietor, a round-bodied, gray-haired, and smooth-faced old man, who arose and received his visitors politely.

Ora made known her business.

The old tradesman, eying her doubtfully, though kindly, inquired if it were for herself or for her parents, or other relatives, she wanted to rent the house.

Ora replied that it was for herself and for her daughter.

The landlord eyed her more doubtfully than before, but noticing the deep mourning worn by herself and her companion, came to the conclusion that Ora must be the youthful widow of some middle-aged or old man, and that the "daughter" was a step-child.

He then asked for references.

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"I have none in this city, where I am quite a stranger; but in lieu of all reference, I am willing to pay you a quarter's rent in advance, as well as to pay you cash for the furniture I shall presently select to fit this house," said Ora.

"Oh!" thought the landlord, as he afterward confided to a friend, "some old army or navy officer's widow, who has been following him round the world, and is now left without a roof to cover her head, whatever else she may have, and so has decided to go cheaply to housekeeping in Washington, to be on hand to prosecute some claim or other before Congress next session. They all have 'claims,' and when they are young and pretty as this one, generally get them."

"I hope my terms are satisfactory," said Ora, feeling somewhat annoyed at the man's long pause.

"Highly so, madam! Highly so! You can take possession at once. What shall I have the honor of showing you in the way of furniture?" said Mr. Abel with alacrity.

"Something of everything suitable for such a house to fit it up from chamber to kitchen," said Ora.

"Be so good as to come with me, then, if you please, madam," said the upholsterer, arising to lead his customer through his warerooms, which contained everything that she could require to fit up her cottage.

Ora, always consulting Bevvie, selected three sets of cottage chamber furniture, a parlor suit, a dining-room suit, a kitchen outfit, and, as the summer was coming on, lace curtains for the windows and straw matting for

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the floors. All her purchases, including bed and table linen, did not exceed in price four hundred dollars.

She put a five hundred dollar "greenback" in the lucky landlord's hands, and asked him to take out the amount of the first quarter's rent as well as the price of the furniture, and to give her a receipt for both.

"To whose—in whose—favor—a—shall I make out these receipts, ma'am?" inquired Mr. Abel politely.

"Oresta Orkney," replied the young lady.

Mr. Abel took the note to his desk, surreptitiously scrutinized it, tested it by the bank note detector, and then finding it all right, brought the change and the receipts to his new tenant.

"You know where to find the key, ma'am, and you can take possession at once," he said, urbanely.

"Scarcely, until the house is properly fitted up. I must leave that entirely to you, Mr. Abel! I must beg you to have the matting tacked down, curtains put up, furniture placed, and crockery ware and linen stored in their proper places. I have made a few pencil notes here while I selected the articles, as to where I wish them placed. You can be guided by them so far as they go, and afterward by your own discretion."

"All right, ma'am. This is the 27th of March, and I will have the house ready for you by the 1st of April."

"Thank you. Good day," said Ora, as she drew Bevvie's arm within her own, and turned to leave the warehouse.

But the upholsterer and landlord politely attended

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the two ladies to their carriage, saw them seated, and stood bowing until the door was closed and the horses started.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE EVENTS AT THE CONVENT

"So WE take possession of our humble little home on the 1st of April! Now, what are smiling at, Bevvie? though it is pleasant to see you smile," inquired Ora of her sometime sad companion, as they rolled on their way toward their hotel.

"I was just thinking that if Aunt Countie could have heard you, she might have said that 'All Fools' Day' was a most fit and proper time on which to begin our housekeeping," replied the younger girl.

"Yes! that she would! She would not have let that chance for repartee slip," replied Ora, who was opening her pocketbook to put away her receipts and her change, which, until this moment, she had held in her hand.

Suddenly she paused, and burst into a peal of laughter.

Now it was Bevvie's turn to require an explanation.

"What in the world are you laughing at, Ora?" she inquired.

"Well, you heard that old man ask my name when he was going to write the receipt, and you heard me tell him that it was Oresta Orkney, did you not?"

"Of course I did."

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"Well, my dear, the old noodle has written it Mrs. Forester Ogden! What do you think of that?"

"The sound must have deceived him. Oresta is such a very uncommon name," said Bevvie.

"That is why I like it," declared Ora.

"Five days more at the hotel, with nothing at all to do!" sighed Bevvie.

"Yes, my dear, we have got to look up a servant—a maid-of-all-work—for our poor little home. Besides, we have to do some shopping," replied Ora.

"Yes, but all this need not occupy a day," continued the girl.

"Bevvie, darling, it will be dull for you. Now, suppose we pack a pair of hand bags and go a short journey to visit our old convent? What do you say?"

"Oh, I should be delighted, Ora. Do go."

"Very well, we can go this very Friday evening, and stay over Sunday, return Monday, and have that day and Tuesday to hunt up a servant. The shopping need not really be done until we are well settled in the house."

"Oh, you are as good as an angel to me always, dearest Ora!" exclaimed Bevvie, clasping and kissing the hand of her friend.

"Oh, dear! Please do not say that to me ever again, Bevvie. It makes me feel guilty and ashamed. That is the only effect it ever has on me," said Ora, in all sincerity.

"Then, what is a poor soul to say to one who almost oppresses her with benefits?" tearfully inquired Bevvie.

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Ora took the girl in her arms as if she had been a baby, folded her to her bosom, kissed away all the tears, and smilingly answered:

"Say just nothing at all, darling. It is not required of you. I love you, and I delight to make you happy. God bless you!"

Their further talk was stopped by the drawing up of the carriage at the ladies' door of the hotel.

They had returned in time for dinner, after which they spent the evening in making their small arrangements for their journey.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, they took the express train to B., where they arrived at nine o'clock.

They drove from the depot direct to the convent, where they were received by Sister Agnes and the mother superior with the warmest welcome.

They were immediately taken up stairs and given possession of their own old familiar room, which happened to be unoccupied at the time.

When they had laid off their bonnets, the abbess notified Ora that she wished to have some private conversation with her, and leaving Bevvie in charge of Sister Agnes, she led the young lady away to a private sitting room.

"My dear," began the venerable woman as soon as they were seated, "have you heard anything of the family or friends of your protégé, Agnes Belvidera?"

"Not one word. They are as unknown to me as they

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were on that day sixteen years ago when she, a babe, was left in your care. Why do you ask, dear mother?" inquired Ora.

"Because of an incident that occurred here a few weeks after you left us last summer."

"Ah! what was that, mother dear?" inquired Ora.

"It was on the 26th of last August, just sixteen years to a day since Agnes Belvidera was left with us, that a gentleman called here and asked to see the mother superior on important business. He was shown into the parlor and I came to the grating to meet him; and I found there waiting for me a tall, slender, fair young man, who spoke with a German accent and apologized for disturbing me. I replied that I was always at the command of any one to whom I could render any Christian service, and inquired what I could do for him."

"He spoke with a German accent you say, mother? What was his name?" anxiously inquired Ora, who instantly connected this visitor with the young German who had joined their party in Canada and traveled with them all summer.

"He had sent me no card and he gave me no name—conduct which I could not but think unusual, to say the least of it, at the time—but, my child, it was not for me to cross-question my visitor."

"No," assented Ora.

"When I inquired in what manner I could serve him, he replied by asking me if I remembered a female infant of a few weeks of age that was left at the convent gate sixteen years ago that date.

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"I told him that I perfectly remembered the child, who had been brought in and baptized in our chapel, where her name, and the names of her sponsors, and the date of her admission into our asylum, were duly recorded, and where the few proofs of her identity were carefully preserved.

"He then anxiously inquired if the child still lived.

"I told him that the babe had lived to grow up into a comely and discreet maiden, who had been adopted and educated by wealthy friends.

"At this he seemed very much moved, and he inquired if these friends were Germans.

"I answered that they were Americans, and then I related to him the whole story of Agnes Belvidera's adoption by you and your father, for you were the first to do it, Ora.

"He seemed to appreciate the story, and to be very much pleased. He then asked me if he could be permitted to see the young lady. I explained to him that she had left the convent, and had gone with her benefactress and a select party of friends on a summer tour through Canada.

"He seemed very much disappointed, and after some reflection he asked if I thought there was a probability of his overtaking the party if he should go after them.

"I told him that you would be in Montreal, at St. Lawrence Hall, during the last week in August, and that I had been notified to forward all letters to that address.

"He started up quite suddenly then, and said that if

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he should set out that same afternoon, he would have ample time to join you there. Then, as with second thought, he sat down again, and asked me if there were ample legal proofs to identify the young girl of to-day with the infant that had been left in their care sixteen years ago—not only such proofs as might satisfy an ordinary court of law, but such as might convince, even against their wills, such high tribunals as may be called upon to decide the fate of dynasties.

"I replied that I did not know how much evidence might be needed in the extreme case he cited, but that there was a superabundance of evidence that the young lady known as Agnes Belvidera Boone was one and the same being with the infant that had been left at our gate on the 26th of August, sixteen years ago.

"He thanked me with much effusion and left," concluded the lady superior.

"Without giving his name?" exclaimed Ora.

"Without giving his name," replied the elder lady.

"And you let him go off so, and never questioned him?"

"My daughter, it was not my office to question him. But what I wish to know of you is this: Did this man join you in Montreal?"

"I cannot tell—I do not know," replied Ora, in a troubled voice.

"You 'do not know,' my dear child? Surely you must know whether such a man, coming on such an important mission, joined you, or did not join you," said the abbess, gravely.

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"Indeed I do not. A young German, apparently of high rank, and partly answering to your description—since he was tall, slight, and fair, and spoke with a foreign accent—made the acquaintance of Mr. Pendleton and got introduced to our party at the St. Lawrence Hall, in Montreal, and traveled for the remainder of the summer and autumn; but he never once alluded to the Convent of the Annunciaion, or to any child left on its charity, or showed the slightest curiosity in the antecedents of Belvidera," said Ora, anxiously.

"Yet his time of appearance at St. Lawrence Hall and his personal description tally perfectly with all I know of the stranger who called here," said the lady superior.

"I am not so sure of that last correspondence. Both men, it seems, were tall, slight, fair, young, and spoke English with a foreign accent; but, then, you know, mother dear, that there are so many men that are tall, slight, fair, and young and speak English with a foreign accent. We must find some closer features of resemblance, in order to identify them as one individual —your visitor's eyes, for instance. Were they of a very pure, dark, bright blue, with a soft, steady, confiding way of looking into yours?"

"Holy saints, my child! What are you talking about? How should I know? I never look into a man's eyes!" exclaimed the mother superior, crossing herself.

"Pardon, madám," said Ora, demurely. "But his features, then? You may have noticed them. Were they Teutonic, as they ought to have been in a German, or were they Grecian?"

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"Grecian, certainly, pure Grecian," replied the abbess, recovering herself.

"And his blonde hair—was it sandy or sunny?"

"Sunny, child."

"And his voice, mother dear? Was it an ordinary man's voice, or was it full, deep, rich and melodious?"

"Very melodious, my child! I noticed that particularly, and thought what a beautiful voice it would be for intoning and chanting the psalms and anthems."

"And his hand!"

"A small, white, elegantly shaped hand like a lady's. I just happened to notice that, thought such vanities do not interest me," said the venerable woman, gravely.

"Fritz, for a million!" exclaimed Ora.

"What do you say, my dear?" inquired the abbess.

"I think your strange visitor and our traveling companion was the same man," said Ora.

"Yes; I think so, too," assented the abbess.

"Though why he did not make known to us his interest in Bevvie's past life I cannot even conjecture," said Ora.

"Nor can I," added the abbess.

And then Ora for an instant forgot her pledge of secrecy, and felt an impulse to confide to the abbess the story of the German's secret loving-making to Bevvie and their private marriage in the church of St. Lucie. But she remembered her promise in time to keep it, and was silent.

"But you knew this gentleman's name, of course?" said the abbess.

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"Yes; he had a string of unpronounceable German names, the first of which was Frederick, so we called him 'Fritz' behind his back."

"And he parted with you without giving you any intimation of his acquaintance with the family history of Bevvie?" inquired the abbess.

"He left, and 'made no sign' to that effect," replied Ora.

The ringing of the abbess' dinner bell broke up the *tête-à-tête.*

"I must beg one favor of you, mother, and that is not to mention this stranger's visit to our Bevvie. It would only trouble her to no purpose," said Ora, as they left the parlor together.

"I agree with you. I shall not mention it," assented the abbess.

Ora and Bevvie, as cherished guests of the convent, dined at the private table of the lady superior.

As this was the middle of the academic term and also the last week in Lent, the sisterhood had their time completely taken up by their religious devotions and professional labors, so that their visitors were very much left to themselves.

Bevvie passed most of her waking hours in an arm-chair, with a prayer-book in her hands, and rocked and read.

Ora, since hearing of the stranger's visit to the convent, had material enough for speculation to engage all her thought.

Who was this mysterious German? What connection

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had he with the unknown story of Bevvie's parentage? Why did he follow her party to Canada? Or, being there, why did he keep his knowledge of her hidden past a secret? Finally, why did he marry her privately, though regularly and lawfully, and go off and leave her to her fate?

Ora could find no answer to these often recurring questions.

It was all mystery.

CHAPTER X

WITHIN THE CLOUD

She loved—she knew not how or why!
Love seemed to come through ear and eye;
  It seemed to come the common ways—
  The old, sad tale, the common wail.
It was her doom! "Her doom!" we cry;
  It was the curse of ancient days.

In form and face he must have seemed
  A human splendor, brave and strong,
  Whose look was light, whose speech was song—
The man of whom this maiden dreamed;
  Who crossed her path and wooed her long,
  Fulfilled her dream and wrought her wrong.

—W. H. HOLCOMBE.

ON Monday, Ora, with her companion, left the Convent of the Annunciation to return to Washington city.

On taking leave of the good sisterhood she promised

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to visit them again very soon, and so she left them under the impression that she had come all the way from Owlwood only to see her old teachers, and that she was going straight back now to the farm.

Not that Miss Orkney had said or done anything to give this impression, but that the nuns had taken it for granted that her journey had had no other goal than the academy in which she had spent sixteen years of her young life.

Ora and Bevvie reached the city at noon and went directly to their rooms at the Rugby.

As soon as they had taken off their bonnets and had sat down to rest, Ora said:

"I have changed my mind, Bevvie, about going to housekeeping in that little cottage on the 1st of April."

"Indeed! But you can't help taking it now! You have paid three months in advance and bought all the furniture, and spent nearly five hundred dollars," said Bevvie in surprise.

"I know! I consider all that, and I shall take the house a little later; but for the present I shall shut it up and leave the key with the next door neighbor."

"And then what will you do, Ora? Not—not go back to Owlwood?"

"Certainly not! Don't alarm yourself, Bevvie! I shall take you to Montreal."

"To Montreal!" echoed the young girl, with a gasp that left her pretty little red lips apart.

"Yes, to Montreal! I must hedge you about with every sort of precaution, my darling. We will go to

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Montreal and to the Church of St. Lucie, where you were married. I must inspect that parish register——"

"You do not doubt my word, Ora? You do not doubt that I was married there?" exclaimed Bevvie, with a troubled look.

"No, my darling!" heartily responded the young lady. "And—no one else must doubt it when the time shall come to tell of it! That is the reason why I must take you to Montreal, and to the church where the ceremony was performed; I must see the parish register, get an attested copy of the marriage record, and if possible confront you with that German priest who was an old friend of the bridegroom's family and a witness to the marriage; and——"

"Oh!" anxiously interrupted the younger girl, "don't you know that we are both in honor bound not to reveal this marriage? I myself was sworn to secrecy toward all the world except yourself, and only allowed to tell you in the event of extreme necessity, and then obliged to bind you to secrecy also!"

"I know all that, my dear! And we are not going to break our words or to talk of your marriage except to those who are in the secret," said Ora gently.

"Oh, you know that to breathe it between ourselves is to give it to the winds!"

"That is a natural but a very morbid fear, Bevvie!"

"What has caused you to change your mind so suddenly and resolve to go to Montreal to collect all these proofs, Ora?" uneasily inquired Bevvie.

"Reflection, my dear," evasively answered the young

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lady—"reflection upon your very trying position and upon the necessity of protecting you in every manner from misconstruction and wrong—even greater wrong than you have yet suffered," she added, but she did not think it judicious to explain to this sensitive and excitable creature that the reflection of which she spoke had been awakened by the news of the foreigner's visit to the convent, and inquiries about the child Belvidera, and by her well grounded suspicions that this man was no other than the Fritz of their autumn travels.

"How long shall we stay in Montreal, Ora, dear?" inquired Bevvie, fretfully. "I am so tired of being hauled from place to place! When shall we settle down?"

"After we have collected all the proofs of your marriage," replied the young lady, in a grave and patient tone. "We shall settle down in Montreal and wait there for the arrival of your child, who must be baptized and registered in the parish where its parents were married, and if possible the baptismal rites must be administered by the same priest who performed the marriage ceremony. Don't you see, dear, how necessary all this is? How do you know what vast interest may be involved here!"

"Oh, Ora! You will not let me call you my guardian angel, yet you are all that! and more than all that! I look back now upon my life, and I think of all that you have been to me! I was a poor, helpless babe, abandoned by my parents, and you, a little child yourself, adopted me."

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"My dear father did," said Ora, gently.

"At your own sweet suggestion, and that you might deny yourself all childish toys and pleasures to spend all your pocket money to buy milk and clothing for your 'child'! Oh, Ora! I have heard the whole story a hundred times from Sister Agnes and the elder nuns! I know all that you have done for me, dear!"

"It was a great, a very great delight to me, dear Bevvie!" said the young lady, smiling.

"Yes! I know it was! because you are an angel and charity is the delight of angels!"

"Hush, Bevvie, dear! I am nothing of the sort, and very far from it! Aunt Molly and Aunt Countie could tell you better than that!" said Ora, with her merry laugh.

'Oh, they!" exclaimed Bevvie in a cheapening tone that was not at all flattering to the good ladies of Owlwood. "Yet," she continued, "when I was a poor little babe, abandoned by father and mother, you, a little child, took me up and cared for me. Now that I am a poor wife, deserted by her husband, you, a young lady, take me up still and still protect me. Ah, Ora, was it ever known before in this cruel world that a poor creature was in infancy forsaken by her parents, and in womanhood by her husband? Ora, I could cry with self-pity, if I had not you!—you who are worth all of them—father, mother, and husband."

"Hush, darling. We know so little of them that we cannot judge," said Miss Orkney.

"You are so patient and so hopeful, Ora! Ah! if

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you hadn't been, how could you have borne with me? I have been a great trial to you, Ora!"

"You have been a great happiness to me, dearest! And now I must go and write a note to my landlord—how strange it sounds to me to talk of my landlord!—I who am a landlord myself, or, I should say, a landlady, anyway a landholder. I must write to Mr. Abel, and tell him that we are going on a journey, and that after he has finished the little housie he must shut it up and leave the key with the woman next door until our return. Do you put on your wrapper and lie down and rest yourself until dinner, darling," said Miss Orkney, as she arose and went for her traveling writing case.

The next morning Miss Orkney and her protégé started for Canada, traveling by easy stages, sleeping the first night in New York, the second in Albany, and arriving on the third at Montreal.

They took rooms at their former stopping place, St. Lawrence Hall, and as they had reached the city at a late hour, they slept very late into the next morning.

After a slight breakfast, which they took in their rooms, they called for a cab, and drove to the Church of St. Lucie.

The church was open, though no public worship was going on within it. Several people were praying before the altar, and several were scattered through the pews.

Ora looked around for some one in authority of whom she might obtain the information she sought.

Seeing, at length, an old man in a priestly-looking black coat and a round black skull cap—an old man

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who might have been a monk or the sexton—she went to him and ask respectfully whether she might be permitted to look at the parish register.

He answered her politely in broken English that she could do so if she pleased.

"To whom shall I apply to show me the books?" she naïvely inquired.

"I will that pleasure to myself give to take you to the vestry, madam," he answered, with a bow and a wave of the hand, as he led the way into the vestry, where the records of the church were kept.

"For what year, madam?" inquired the guide.

"For the last year and the month of September," replied Miss Orkney.

The old man took down from a shelf a heavy folio, seemingly bound in sole leather and closed with brass clasps, and laid it open on the table in the middle of the room, and turned over the vellum leaves until he came to the month of September, when he said:

"There, madam, the pages are to inspect you ask."

"I thank you, sir," said Ora, as she bowed to the old guide, and then she beckoned Bevvie to come to her side.

Both approached the table. Bevvie was trembling excessively. The scene revived too painfully the past.

Ora looked at the two pages before her. The first page, on her left hand, was written all the way down with names, mostly French, that she had never heard of before.

But there, at the head of the second page, on her

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right hand, was the marriage she wished to see, duly recorded and signed by Frederick von Hohenfels, the bridegroom; Agnes Belvidera Boone, the bride; Johann Muller, S. J., witness; and the Right Reverend Pierre Rouget, officiating priest.

"This is quite right. Thank heaven!" fervently exclaimed Miss Orkney.

"Madam is satisfied?" inquired the priestly guide, wistfully observing the emotion of the young lady.

"Quite satisfied, sir. May I be permitted to take away an attested copy of the record?"

"*Sans* doubt, madam."

"Pray tell me, is the Rev. Father Muller still attached to the cathedral?"

"Oui, madam."

"Where can I see him?"

"Madam cannot see him to-day. The reverend father has gone into retreat, but will be out on Sunday morning," replied their guide, and while he spoke he took pen, ink, and paper from the table drawer and laid them before Ora, inquiring at last:

"Will madam the copy make with her own hand?"

"Thank you, sir; yes," said Ora, seating herself at the table and beginning her task.

"Would you be so very kind as to find two witnesses for me?" inquired Ora, when she had finished the copy.

"Certainly, madam. But will not I myself and the young demoiselle," he said, with a bow and a wave of the hand toward Bevvie, "be witness sufficient?"

"I shall thank you very much for your own signature,

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sir, but the young demoiselle is not competent," politely replied Ora.

"Ah! ah! Then Jacques I will summon," said the old man, as he left the room.

"Come, courage, Bevvie!" said the young lady to her drooping companion.

"Oh, Ora! This brings it all back!" wailed Bevvie.

"I know it does, dear; but bear up! Hush, now! Here comes the old gentleman!"

Their guide, in fact, re-entered at this moment, bringing with him a young man in the long coat and cap of a theological student.

"M. Jacques Leroy," said the old man, presenting the new-comer.

Ora bowed and handed the pen to their guide, who carefully compared the copy with the original, and signed his name to the former—Jean Dubois. Then he passed the pen to the younger man, explaining what was wanted of him.

The student smiled graciously, showing all his white teeth, and then read both the register and the copy, and signed the latter with his name, Jacques Leroy.

Ora thanked both witnesses and took leave, leading Bevvie, who seemed both stupefied and exhausted.

They went straight back to their hotel, and rested there the remainder of the day.

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CHAPTER XI

FATHER MULLER

On the following Monday they went again to the Church of St. Lucie to inquire for the German priest, and was directed to his place of abode.

On inquiring at the house, they were at once shown up into a study, where they found the father in his cap and gown, in a leathern arm-chair, engaged in perusing a large folio that lay upon his knees.

He closed the volume, laid it on the table and arose to meet his visitors. He recognized Bevvie at a glance and accosted her with a smile.

"Ah! my daughter; to see you I am glad! Where, then, is your husband?" he said, gayly.

"Father, let me present my friend—Miss Orkney," said Bevvie, ignoring the question.

"Miss Orkney, to see you I am glad. Young ladies, rest yourselves on those chairs. My good daughter, where is your husband?"

"He has gone to Germany, father," said Bevvie at length, with a great effort of self-control.

"Ah! to Germany! And how long since that he has gone, my goot child?"

"He went—last November," replied Bevvie with difficulty.

"And you—not go with him? That is not goot!—not goot! Why you not go with him?"

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"It was not convenient for him to take me."

"Not convenient for him to take you? Ah! ah! but you hear from him often by the letters? He is in goot healts? And you go to him very soon?"

"I do not know, father."

"You—not—know?" said the old priest, slowly and thoughtfully. "You—not know—if your husband is in goot healts or bat? How is it so?"

"I have not heard from him, father, since he left me on the first of November."

"Ah! ah! But how is it so? How is it so?" inquired the priest with a troubled look.

"I am not able to tell you. He promised to write often, but I have received no letter, not even in answer to those I have written him to the address he gave me. He promised also to return and claim me by the first of January; but he has not done so, as you see."

"Ah! ah! That is not goot! That is bat! bat! But he proclaimed his marriage to you, then, before he left the country?"

"No, father; he did not. Only, on parting from me that day, he conceded to me the privilege of making it known to my dear friend and benefactress here, but only in the event of extreme necessity, and then under a pledge of secrecy."

"Bat! bat! bat! That he does not write—what do you think?" inquired the old priest, fixing his eyes wistfully on the girl's face.

"I think—that something—has happened to him," replied Bevvie, almost breaking down.

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The old man slowly shook his black-capped head.

"I not think so, my child. I will write to him myself. He will answer me."

"Sit back in your chair and recover yourself, dear Bevvie. Do not attempt to say any more. Let me talk," said Ora, entering into the conversation now for the first time, and, turning to the old priest, she said respectfully:

"Father, you were present and indorsed by your presence this secret marriage, which seems to have been quite regular and legal. Was it so?"

"Surely, surely, my goot young laty, or to assist at it I would not," responded the priest.

"But does the church approve such secret marriages? I always thought it did not even permit them."

"Under conditions, my goot child—under conditions."

"Under certain exceptional circumstances, I presume?"

"Yes, yes."

"And did these exceptional circumstances exist in the case of this marriage?"

"Surely, surely, or it would not have been secret."

"Father," said Miss Orkney, solemnly, "I have been this young lady's protectress from the days of my childhood and her infancy. At the time of this strange marriage I was her legal guardian. I have the right to demand, and I do demand, to know the precise nature of those circumstances that made it necessary to keep her marriage a secret, and in this way exposing her to cruel misconstructions and misery."

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"My goot child, you might as well to reveal the sacred trusts of the confessional ask me. My lips are sealed on that subject. But assure yourself, my goot daughter, that our dear child here is safe. Her marriage it is lawful; it is sacred. What would you more?"

"Her happiness and security for the future," replied Ora.

The old German raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders in a heavy sort of way as he answered:

"You impossibilities demand. Who happiness and security for the future to enjoy can presume to demand? Not monarchs on their thrones."

Ora arose to take leave.

Bevvie followed her example.

"How long will you in Montreal, my children, abide?" inquired the old priest, also rising.

"For some weeks or months. We are at St. Lawrence Hall now, but we wish to find furnished apartments," replied Ora.

"You have frents in the city, then?"

"Not one—not an acquaintance but yourself—and—a priest and a student at the church, who do not even know our names."

"Then, my goot children, you to trouble might arrive lodgings among strangers seeking. Permit to me the privilege you to serve in this."

"Oh, thank you very, very much for the favor we did not dare to beg. If you will take so much trouble for us, you will put us under a great obligation," said Ora, warmly.

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"My acquaintance with the city will to do this enable me with ease and pleasure. Of apartments how much require you?"

"Two large chambers, a parlor and a bath room, with board, if possible. If not, with the privilege of the kitchen. And we want a servant, which, perhaps, father, since you are so very good to us, you might find among the honest poor of your pastoral charge. We should prefer a middle-aged or old woman. We are, perhaps, presuming too far?" added Miss Orkney, deprecatingly.

"No, no, no, my goot child, no! To all this will I give myself with comfort and pleasure; and to you will I come, at the St. Lawrence Hall, when all this I have done."

He shook hands kindly with his visitors, and so dismissed them.

Three days later the old priest came to their sitting room in the hotel, and said:

"I have the lodgings taken. They are better than goot. I have a discreet woman placed on you to attend. You shall see. To like them you will be sure. Will you, with me, to the house go now? On the street of St. James it is, a very short walk."

Ora thanked the old gentleman warmly, and made Bevvie and herself quickly ready to accompany him.

A short walk, as he had said, brought them to a cheerful-looking gray stone house, with a book and stationery store on the ground floor, whose windows were en-

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riched with pictures, statuettes, and vases that were real works of art.

"Madam Dubourg, the business manages herself, with the help of her son, and M. Dubourg died three years ago. He was full of years and grace eighty-five. Madam is younger by twenty years. Goot woman she is," explained their guide, as he rang the bell of a side door which was the private entrance to the house.

A neat servant girl appeared at the open door.

"Ah! Marie, my goot girl, up stairs show these ladies. Madam their visit expects."

The girl dropped her eyes and bowed gravely before turning to lead the way up stairs to a front parlor, where a grave, courteous matron of about sixty-five years of age, dressed in a widow's garb, and with her gray hair parted under a widow's cap, came forward to receive the visitors.

"This is Miss Orkney, the lady who wishes to take your rooms. This is Madam Belvidera, whose husband is absent in Europe. My children, this is your landlady, my friend Madam Dubourg," said the priest, introducing the parties to each other.

The old lady welcomed the two younger ones with politeness, and inquired if they would look at their apartments.

Ora thanked her and assented.

The priest then said that he would leave them to make their arrangements, and with a low bow took his leave.

The Frenchwoman now requested her new acquaint-

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ances to look around upon the parlor in which they stood and tell her if they approved of it.

The could but like it. It was a pretty room, upholstered in blue and white, with a soft, warm carpet, with deep, comfortable arm-chairs, with two tall windows overlooking the street, draped with curtains of blue damask and white lace. Between these windows a tall, narrow mirror, reaching from the console to the ceiling, a bright steel grate, in which burned a sea coal fire, surmounted by a white marble mantel piece and a large square mirror that reached the ceiling.

There were pretty porcelain vases and a large ornamental clock on the mantel piece, and there were Persian rugs before the fender and before the sofa, and there were comfortable foot stools all about.

Ora expressed her perfect satisfaction with the parlor, and the lodgers were then shown into two pretty, white draped bedrooms that were *en suite* with the parlor, opening one behind the other toward the rear. These, with a little hall chamber at the head of the stairs, were all.

"We are very much pleased with the apartments," said Ora.

"And very grateful to Father Muller for recommending us here," said Bevvie, speaking for the first time in her timid voice.

"Merci, madam! It is I who should be very grateful to the good father for sending you to me," politely replied the French widow.

The terms were then agreed upon. These rooms,

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with board, attendance and a private table for two hundred dollars a month, to be paid weekly; possession to be given immediately.

Ora took leave of her new landlady and returned with Bevvie to their hotel to settle their bills and remove their luggage.

Before night they were comfortably installed in their new quarters.

As they sat in the two deep arm-chairs before the cozy sea coal fire, which the climate of Canada rendered necessary even in April, the door was opened and an elderly woman entered, who was unceremoniously introduced by Marie, the waitress, as—

"The person sent by Père Muller to wait on madam."

And having made this announcement, Marie retired, closing the door behind her and leaving the person standing there.

"Oh! come to the fire, please!" said Ora, as she arose to meet a comely, motherly looking matron of about fifty years of age, clothed in a gray dress, black and white plaid shawl and gray silk bonnet.

"Mary McCarty, if you please, ma'am, a lone widdy woman, rickiminded by Father Muller," said the matron, with a courtesy.

"I am glad you have come. Your duties will be very light here—only to wait on two ladies," began Miss Orkney, but the woman interrupted her with—

"Sure it's meself that's not afraid of work, ma'am."

"Having been sent to us by Father Muller, I am sure you will give satisfaction. You will find your little

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room out there at the head of the stairs. We shall not want you to do anything this evening. You have the privilege of passing your leisure time with the servants in the kitchen if you wish."

So Miss Orkney was about to dismiss her new acquisition, when the latter aptly inquired:

"But if you plaze, ma'am, about the wages?"

Ora, laughing at her own forgetfulness and unbusiness-like ways in general, inquired in her turn what were Mrs. McCarty's own views on the subject.

Mrs. McCarty's views were "Twilve dollars and a half a month and two ivinings in the week out."

These were agreed upon, and the matron left "to fetch her box," as she explained.

In this manner, much more respectably and comfortably than they could have hoped under the circumstances, our "errant ladies" settled themselves for the summer.

Their French landlady was very kind to them; but they did not make the acquaintance of her son or daughter. Their meals were excellently cooked and neatly served in their own parlor.

Their friend, Father Muller, came often to see them, always speaking of Bevvie as Madam Belvidera—a habit that he justified to the doubting Ora by saying:

"Every married woman of any state, madam is called. The title for an empress goot enough is, and for a servant not too goot! Our little veiled princess here Madam Belvidera so much as anything else is."

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From Father Fuller Ora also learned something more about their French landlady.

On expressing her surprise that the proprietress of so handsome a store should let the best rooms in her house to lodgers, the old priest explained that the late M. Dubourg had left his affairs in so much embarrassment, and his business encumbered by so many debts, that it was all his widow could do to keep out of bankruptcy.

"Why," said the old priest, "even a salesman or a bookkeeper to pay she cannot affort. M. Louis, the son, behind the counter stands. Mdlle. Adelle at the accountant's desk sits all day and half the night. Ah! and madam herself the house keeps with only maid Marie her to help. Ah, my dear children, so glad was I for her such goot lotgers to find as for you such safe home to secure." And the old man rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

Father Muller would have sent some of his flock to visit these two stray lambs, but they prayed him not to do so, as they wished to live very quietly.

Meanwhile the good priest had written the promised letter to Germany, and was counting the days until he could reasonably hope for an answer, which he had promised to bring without the loss of an hour to the anxious wife.

And Ora had her own personal anxieties. She had, before leaving Owlwood, left word at the little hamlet of Umbra that all her letters should be forwarded to the general post office at Washington. And before leaving

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the last-mentioned place she had left orders that her letters should be forwarded thence to the general post office, Montreal.

And now she received a batch, among them one from her cousin, Conrad Orkney, expressing his surprise and disapprobation of what he called the purposeless and most imprudent tour she had announced to him, and entreating and almost commanding her to forego it.

He assured her that it was not enough for a woman to be an angel, but she must also be a discreet angel; and he quoted that stale proverb about Cæsar's wife.

Ora wept over this letter, and then dashed her tears aside, and sat down and wrote a saucy reply, telling her mentor that she was a woman of the nineteenth century and a citizeness of the model republic, and not a lady of Turkey in the dark ages; that the sooner he got rid of his old world ideas the better for him; and that he must give over quoting musty proverbs like that about Cæsar's wife, and say something original and brilliant, if he ever hoped to shine at the bar. She told him to direct his future letters to the general post-office, Washington, until further instructions.

Ora cried more after writing this letter than she had cried before; but, nevertheless, she sealed it up, and took a rapid journey by rail to mail it at the first post town across the boundary line into the United States, for she felt obliged, for the sake of her protégé, to hide her place of abode.

Having seen her letter off, she took the first train

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back to Montreal, and returned to Bevvie the same night.

But weeks passed and brought no second letter from Conrad Orkney, and none from the mysteriously absent and silent bridegroom of poor Bevvie.

CHAPTER XII

THE LITTLE PILGRIM

On a beautiful morning in June, some two months after the settlement of Ora and Bevvie in their new lodgings, the two young women sat alone together in a neat, white-draped bed-chamber adjoining their parlor.

Bevvie, pale and pretty, in a delicate pink flannel wrapper, reclined in a white-draped easy chair, with her feet upon a white-covered footstool, near a lace-curtained window. On her lap, dressed in its long embroidered cambric slip and wrapped in its fine embroidered merino shawl, lay an infant about four weeks old. Bevvie sat pensively contemplating her baby.

Ora, dressed in a light gray morning suit, sat in another arm- chair, engaged in embroidering an infant's cloak, and in gravely watching over the mother and child.

"Bevvie, dear," she said at length, "we must take the baby to church to-morrow and have him christened."

"Why not wait until Sunday?" inquired the young mother.

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"Because we must have the rite administered by Father Muller, who assisted at your marriage ceremony; and we must have his undivided attention, so that the registry of the baptism be made under my own eyes, and that I may get an attested copy of it to file away with the attested copy of your marriage record. Bevvie, you do not know how important these documents may prove to you, or to your child, in the future. It was for the purpose of having the babe's baptism registered in the same church in which your marriage is registered that I brought you all the way to this city."

"Ah, yes, Ora, I know. You spend more time, thought and money on me than I deserve. It would have been better if I and my child had both died! A wife who cannot claim her husband, a child who cannot claim his father, had better both be out of a world that has no recognized place for them!" moaned the deserted young mother, whose heart was sick unto death with hope deferred.

"What wicked nonsense you are talking, Bevvie! You have the baby, who will soon grow up into the greatest comfort and happiness that you can conceive of," said Ora, cheerfully.

"But, oh, see what evil my insane secret marriage has wrought. It drove me to madness, and to the very verge of suicide, from which you plucked me at the very last moment; and now—now it has placed me, and you, also, for my sake, in a cruelly false position, and involved us both in a tissue of concealments and de-

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ceptions that may prove as fatal to you as my evil marriage has been disastrous to me!"

"Stay, Bevvie. Stay, dearest. Your position has necessitated concealments, but not deception. We have practiced no deception, love," said Ora gravely.

"Well, no, not deception. I spoke too fast. But these concealments lead people to draw false inferences——"

"Of their own free will. We cannot help that, and are not responsible for it."

"But this is disastrous to you, dear Ora. It has made trouble between you and your lover. He is mystified, suspicious and jealous, and you cannot explain, cannot break your word, expose me, and vindicate yourself. Oh, I know."

"No more of that, Bevvie," suddenly and peremptorily responded Miss Orkney. "If one who has known me from childhood up cannot trust me through everything, he is not worthy of me."

"But, put yourself in his place. He may think that if you cannot trust him with all your secrets——" began Bevvie, but Ora promptly interrupted her:

"I have no secrets of my own, and I will not betray yours to clear myself from criticism."

"Oh, I am afraid this will part you forever!" cried Bevvie.

"Be it so, then," firmly responded Miss Orkney. "I love to have my own way in all things, and I believe it is always a good way, too. And I think it better that I should live single all the days of my life than become the wife of a hard, jealous, suspicious man."

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"Yes; but he loves you and you love him," gently interposed Bevvie; but before she could utter another word Ora had thrown down her needle work and run out of the room.

In the parlor Ora dropped into a chair and gave way to the tempest of tears and sobs that had been gathering in her bosom for the last ten minutes; the great passion of love, sorrow and indignation, which she was at once too proud, tender and considerate to permit the young invalid to suspect.

It was nearly an hour before she was calm enough to rejoin and comfort her troublesome protégé, whom she found sitting in the same place with the baby on her knee.

"I drove you away, Ora! And you are justly angry with me," said Bevvie, deprecatingly.

"No, dearest, no! I am not indeed the least displeased with you; never displeased with you, Bevvie! Do not think so, dear," said Ora, stooping and tenderly kissing the little pale face that was lifted toward hers. "And now tell me, shall we go and have the baby baptized to-morrow?"

"Yes, Ora, yes; certainly if you think it best."

"Then I will write a note to Father Muller at once and ask him to be good enough to appoint some hour to receive us."

The note was written and sent by Mrs. McCarty, who at the end of two hours returned with the answer appointing one o'clock the next afternoon for the baptism.

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The next day, after an early luncheon, Ora, Bevvie and her baby entered a close carriage that had been engaged for the purpose and drove to the Church of St. Lucie, where they found Father Mullcr and two sacristans awaiting them.

There were no other persons in the church. They went to the altar, where the sacred rites were at once commenced.

Ora held the babe in her arms and gave hirn to the priest. When the latter asked:

"What is the name of this child?" she answered:

"Frederick."

And as Frederick the boy baby was baptized—Ora standing godmother and the two sacristans godfathers.

And as Frederick, son of Frederick von Hohenfels and of Agnes Belvidera, his wife, the baptized child was registered, and Ora obtained an attested copy of the register.

On leaving the church she turned to Father Muller and said:

"As we have heard nothing of this absent and silent husband and father, I wish to have some conversation with you in regard to the future of this apparently deserted mother and child. When can you give me an hour?"

"I will to your house come at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, if that convenient will be," replied the priest.

"Thank you very much. I shall expect you at that hour, then," said Ora, as she bowed and followed Bevvie, who had gone before her to the carriage.

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The next day Father Muller kept his appointment. Ora received him in the parlor. After the usual morning greeting, Ora said:

"I must lay the case before you in all its difficulties, and take counsel with you, Father Muller."

"Do so, my child," said the old man.

"You being the only one in the confidence of this privately married pair, are really the only one with whom I can take counsel on this subject."

"Yes, my child; I know that."

"First tell me—is there any hope of our hearing, soon, from this German?"

Father Muller sighed deeply, and made no other reply.

Ora understood his silence and said:

"Then I must assume the whole care and responsibility of the future of this deserted mother and child. But, father, how long must the secret of this marriage be kept?"

"My dear child, unfortunately was no limit set by the prince."

"And is he either dead or false? And must an innocent wife and helpless child suffer and good reputation die that his will may be accomplished?" indignantly demanded Ora.

"My child, our word we must keep, even if to our own hurt it be! You to publish this marriage might forth go to-day. To hinder you is none; but would you satisfied be that your word you had broken?"

"No, father, I should not; but you have no idea what

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embarrassment I am in. I have a home, kinsfolks, a large circle of dear friends! How am I to account to them for this young mother and child on my hands, if I may not tell them the truth?"

"You must in some retreat them place, to wait of the husband and father the pleasure. Then to your own home and friends alone you may return," gently replied the old priest.

"Never!" exclaimed Ora, emphatically, her blue eyes flashing. "I seem to be the only friend my poor Bevvie has left in the whole world, and I will never put her away from me and never leave, never part with her, until death or her husband's claim shall part us."

"Then the young child you may to nurse put at some good place, and the young mother home take with yourself," mildly suggested the priest, after a thoughtful pause.

"Never!" exclaimed Ora, even more emphatically than before—"never! Come weal, come, wo, never will I separate the child from the mother, or put away, or leave, or part with either until death, or the husband and father shall claim them!"

The old priest dropped his head upon his chest, and folded his hands in meditation or in prayer for a few moments, and then he said very solemnly:

"My goot daughter, you will much undertake—you will much risk and sacrifice by this doing. And what to do with them can you a young lady?"

Ora arose and stood before him, her fine form drawn up; her blooming face and beaming eyes radiant; her

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sunny, golden-brown hair shining like an aureole of glory around her fair brow, and her voice taking the clearest and the most melodious notes, as she said:

"Father Muller, I will take the deserted mother and child back with me to my home and heart. I will protect them there and confront the world!"

CHAPTER XIII

FATHER MULLER'S PLAN

There is not in this world of sin
A soul so deeply sunk therein—
Thronged though it be with crimes and cares,
Revenges, malices, despairs,
However dreary its abodes,
And dedicate to demon gods—
But in its thoroughfares, night and day,
There ever is some golden ray,
Like a sweet child from home estray—
Some light of Heaven, some fragment thence
Of primal love and innocence,
Which keeps the angels on its track,
To love and lure and lead it back.

—Wm. H. Holcombe.

The old priest regarded the enthusiastic girl with mild surprise, and then said:

"Brave and heroic, my daughter, you are. Yes; to recklessness brave, and to foolhardiness heroic. See not you, the world to confront, as you say, scandal and

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wrong and wrath would bring? Think of some better way must I you to help. To-morrow I will here come again."

And he got up to go.

"I thank you, Father Muller, for your kind interest in us; but please listen to this: I will consent to no plan that shall separate Agnes Belvidera and her child from each other or from me."

The old priest bent his head in assent to Ora's words, and passed out.

And the young lady spent the rest of the day in paying bills and making other preparations for departure.

The next day Father Muller came, according to promise, and was received by Ora in the parlor.

After the usual salutations and when they were both seated, the German priest, in his usual "cart before the horse" style of talking, said:

"My daughter, you me can trust, hope I?"

"Most certainly, Father Muller," politely replied Ora.

"And if to you I my word give this mother and child to you to restore in twenty-four hours, them you will permit to leave you for that little time?" continued the priest.

"If you will explain, father," replied Ora.

The priest bowed and said:

"The mother and child would I take to-day to the convent of the Hotel Dieu, there in the care of the goot sisters. To-morrow you to the convent go and the child and its mother see, and the child you adopt, and its

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mother with it away bring. To your home take you these. 'This child—whence?' ask your kindred. 'From the Hotel Dieu him I adopt,' answer you. 'What for?' 'Lofe and charity.' All true, my goot daughter. And how simple, behold! Answered all questions. Stopped all lies. Calumny none. Persecution none. For the mother and child in peace you provide. Comes back the princely husband and father at length. Proclaimed is all. Right is all. How simple, behold!"

Ora listened, and suffered herself to be persuaded—suffered, really, for her brave, frank spirit was wounded by this necessity for concealment which verged so nearly toward deception.

That same day Bevvie and her babe were taken out in a carriage to make a visit. The landlady and her family knew no more than that the mother and child had gone out for a little change of air, and were to return the following day.

The next morning Ora, accompanied by Father Muller, drove to the convent. She was introduced by the old priest to the mother abbess; and she was shown all over the buildings.

In due course coming to the orphan asylum she found her protégés, Bevvie and the babe. The adoption was a mere form. Then Ora made a munificent donation to the convent, and carried her "children" back to their lodgings.

And as soon as Bevvie was strong enough to bear the journey they set out for the United States, traveling by easy stages.

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At the end of the second day's journey they reached New York, where they determined to stop and rest for a day or two.

Here an incident occurred that caused great distress and anxiety to the two young women.

They put up at a quiet family hotel, and after a refreshing night's rest and a comfortable breakfast, Ora engaged an open carriage to take her party for a drive through Central Park.

It was while passing through one of the uptown streets, flanked on each side by stately brownstone dwellings, that they found their course impeded by meeting a large number of private carriages, all apparently coming from one point—a fashionable church a few blocks ahead of them, on the right hand side of the street.

"Is it a funeral?" inquired Ora, in the subdued tone in which we speak of such processions, and addressing the man on the box.

"Oh, no, mum," answered the latter, who appeared to be one of the most talkative of his species, and also quite to understand that he had two strangers from the rural districts to deal with. "Oh, not at all, mum. By no means. It's the great wedding, mum, that is!"

"The great wedding! What great wedding?" inquired Ora, while Bevvie, engaged with the baby on her lap, paid little or no attention.

"Why, mum, the grand marriage as have been talked about a month or more. He's a furrin lord, or count, or nabob, or something of that. And she's a hairus, and

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her father's—there, mum!" exclaimed the driver, suddenly breaking off in his discourse and pointing with the handle of his whip to a very elegant open carriage that was just leaving the church door, "there's the bride and groom just driving off. You can get a good view of them as they pass," concluded the man, as he drew the reins and stopped his horses for the purpose named.

But before Ora could follow the direction of his index to see either bride or groom, a shriek from Bevvie caused her to turn sharply around, yes, and just in time to snatch the baby and prevent it from rolling out of the carriage, for his mother had fainted and fallen back, relaxing her hold upon the child.

"Turn your horses' heads! Drive to the nearest drug store!" promptly ordered Ora, who did not lose her presence of mind, though embarrassed with a fainting woman and a screaming child.

The man turned around and stared at the group to see what had happened.

"This lady is ill. Turn and drive back, and stop at the first drug store!" ordered Ora.

The man pointed to the brim of his hat by way of salute, and obeyed.

He soon pulled up before an elegant "pharmacy," and sent a street gamin in to ask one of the "gentlemen" to come out.

A young man responded to the summons, and at Ora's request brought out sal volatile, spirits of lavender, cologne water, and every other restorative she

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could think of, all to be applied to the fainting woman, but all to no purpose.

"Drive back to the hotel as quickly as you can!" exclaimed Ora, after she had paid the druggist and rewarded the gamin.

When they reached the "ladies' entrance," Bevvie still in a deep swoon, had to be lifted out of the carriage in the arms of the porter, and carried bodily up to her room and laid upon the bed.

"And you didn't get a sight at the bride and groom, after all, mum," said the carriage driver when she paid him off.

"No; it was of no consequence," replied the young lady, hurrying back to the bedside of her protégé, where she found the housekeeper of the hotel and a chamber maid busily employed in trying to bring the swooning woman back to consciousness, while the baby in bed, in Ora's own room adjoining, was expanding its lungs in the most approved manner by the most lusty squalls.

"I would send for a doctor, if I were you, miss. I would indeed," said the housekeeper, in a subdued voice, as of one who stood by the dying or the dead.

Ora bent over the marble-like face and form on the bed, and seeing no sign of life there, cast a wild, appealing glance up to the housekeeper's troubled face.

"No," said that matron, in answer to the mute question—"no; she hasn't gone yet. Her heart beats yet; but I would send for a doctor immediately."

"Can you recommend one?" inquired Ora.

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The housekeeper named a physician whose office was near, and Ora rang the bell and dispatched a messenger.

Nearly an hour passed before the arrival of the doctor.

Except the feeble beating of the heart, Bevvie gave no sign of life.

The doctor, while examining his patient, made many inquiries of the pale, scared and anxious Ora.

"Has the young lady been subject to such attacks?"

"No; never," answered Ora.

"Had she received any shock?"

"No; not any. We reached this city only last evening, went for a drive through Central Park this morning, but before reaching the park met with an obstruction from a crowd of carriages coming from some wedding, when she suddenly shrieked and fainted."

"Frightened by the situation?"

"Not in the least. On the contrary, she was interested and amused; there was not a particle of danger; we drew up and stood still to let the carriages pass us, which they did in perfect order. And it was then she shrieked and fainted."

"Has she had a spell of illness lately, or has she been exposed to much fatigue?"

"She was ill some few weeks ago. She recovered quickly and perfectly from that illness."

"What was the nature of the indisposition?"

"She has been married for about eleven months. She has a child five weeks old."

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"Ah! Has she been exposed to any great fatigue or excitement since that event?"

"None whatever."

"None?"

"We have come by easy stages from Canada. She has not shown the least fatigue or uneasiness. A thunderbolt from a clear sky could not be more surprising or unaccountable than the swoon," concluded Ora.

And all the time the doctor had been asking questions he had been busily engaged with the death-like woman.

At last, standing up, he said:

"I must send a message to my assistant."

And taking out his tablets he wrote a few lines, rung for a ticket porter, and dispatched him to the office.

"Take my gig," he said, "and be quick."

Fifteen minutes later a young medical student arrived with an oblong mahogany box under his arm.

"We must try the electric battery," said the doctor at length.

And all the women that were around the bed moved away to give the doctor and his assistant room to operate.

It was yet some minutes after this power had been applied before the patient showed any signs of life, but at length her limbs twitched, her form shuddered, her bosom heaved, her eyelids quivered. She gasped, opened her eyes and returned to consciousness.

But ah! to such a consciousness!

Ora, seeing the medical student take away the box,

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knew that the experiment was at an end and drew near to see the result.

She gazed and shrunk back in horror! The face she had looked upon seemed that of one awakened from death indeed, but awakened among the eternally lost! It was so blanched, so tortured in its wild and dread anguish and despair.

"Some brandy! Quick!" exclaimed the doctor to his assistant.

The latter had that, as he had all else that was required, ready at hand. He drew a small flask from his pocket, poured about a spoonful into the tiny cup that covered the stopper and handed it to his preceptor.

The doctor, slowly, drop by drop, gave it to his patient, who, after taking it all, breathed a little more freely than before.

The doctor took his seat by the bed and signed to the women not to approach the patient.

A little later he administered a sedative and then watched until his patient dropped into a deep sleep.

"She will do now. I will look in again in the afternoon. Meanwhile keep her very quiet," he said, and with a low bow he left the room, followed by his assistant carrying the battery.

Now Ora thanked the housekeeper for her attention, and then went into the adjoining bed chamber, where a kind-hearted maid was walking the wailing baby up and down the room.

"Oh! what shall I do?" exclaimed Ora in distress.

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"What can I do with a hungry infant whose mother is ill?"

"Get a baby's bottle from the corner drug store, and I will prepare the food and fill the bottle," said the housekeeper. "It is easy enough to take care of a baby. All it wants is to be free from pain and full and warm, and it will give no trouble."

Ora followed the matron's advice, and when she had seen the child "full and warm" and fast asleep, she went to take care of the mother. The room was cleared now of all kindly intruders, and Ora sat down at the head of Bevvie's bed to watch her troubled rest, for though Bevvie slept under the influence of the opiate, she often rolled from side to side, and muttered in her sleep.

Ora bent down to listen to her murmurings, but could make out but the name of Bevvie's husband breathed in tones of complaint, entreaty or reproach.

Ora did not go down to dinner, but rang for a sandwich and a cup of coffee to be sent to her room.

It was very late in the afternoon when the doctor called again.

Bevvie still slept, and still rolled and muttered in her sleep.

The doctor wrote a prescription for her to take when she should awake; then he offered to send a professional nurse to watch the patient during the night, but Ora thanked him and declined the offer, saying that she much preferred herself to watch her young friend.

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Then the doctor went away, promising to look in again in the morning.

Bevvie slept on, rolling and murmuring in her sleep, until near midnight, when gradually her restlessness began to subside, and her sleep became profound.

Meanwhile Ora had regularly attended to the baby.

The kind housekeeper had come in once more before retiring for the night, to know if she could be of any more use.

Ora merely asked for some fresh milk, and then thanked and dismissed the matron.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT BEVVIE SAW

Ora changed her dress for a wrapper, and arranged herself comfortably for her night watch.

Bevvie now slept very profoundly until morning.

Ora, who had dozed in her easy chair, was awakened by the sunbeams gleaming through the slats of the window shutters.

She arose, bathed her face and hands and put on her dress, and arranged the room and bed, where the sleeper still lay quietly.

Then she rang for a cup of tea for herself and fresh milk for the baby.

The doctor came early, and finding the patient still

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asleep, felt her pulse, examined her eyes, and finally said:

"If she does not wake within an hour, wake her, give her beef tea and a glass of sherry."

Ora promised to follow his advice, and the doctor went away.

But within ten minutes after his departure Bevvie calmly opened her eyes, and seeing Ora seated by her bed, said:

"Thank heaven! Oh, my dear Ora, I have had such a hideous dream! So glad it was only a dream! Oh, heaven! it seemed so real! I—seemed to have gone through it all—and—I am so weak—as weak as my own little baby. Let me lie here—a little longer, Ora, dear. I cannot get up yet, though it must be late."

Her face was pallid; her eyes were heavy, with dark circles under them; and her voice was very feeble, as she spoke in short gasps and at intervals. Also she had evidently taken no note of time or circumstance since her fainting fit, and supposed this to be the morning after their arrival in the city.

Ora would not undeceive her then.

"Lie still and rest, Bevvie dear. There is no reason in the world why you should rise a moment before you please," was all she said, as she left her chair and slipped out of the room to order the beef tea and wine to be prepared as soon as possible.

"Where is baby?" inquired Bevvie, when Ora returned.

"I took him away, and laid him on my bed in the next

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room, for fear he should disturb you. He is asleep now," answered Ora.

"He is so good! Isn't he good, Ora?" fondly inquired the mother.

"Very good," admitted Ora with a smile.

"And to think I should have had such a wicked, wicked dream about his father, Ora! Oh, if ever a mere dream could be wicked, that was wicked and ought to be repented of and atoned for," exclaimed Bevvie with so much vehemence that she suddenly turned ashen pale and sunk back heavily upon her pillow.

"Bevvie, you have not so thoroughly regained your strength after your illness in Canada, as we had hoped, and you are just off a long, fatiguing journey, so you must be careful, dear, and not excite yourself," said Ora, as she held a bottle of sal volatile to the patient's nose.

"But—I must tell you—my dream," panted Bevvie.

"After you have had, something to strengthen you dear, you shall do so."

"Why are you treating me like an invalid, Ora?"

"Because you are not yet strong, my dear, and you have overtasked yourself in this long journey."

"I did not feel so weak when I went to bed last night. It is this horrid dream that has upset me," said Bevvie, still oblivious of the fact that thirty-six hours had passed since the hour she mentioned, and still under the impression that this was the first morning after her arrival in the city.

The entrance of a waiter, with a bowl of beef tea and

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a glass of sherry on a tray, saved Ora the necessity of giving another evasive reply.

Miss Orkney took the tray from the waiter, set it on a little stand near the bed and dismissed him.

"Why did you bring me this?" inquired Bevvie; "I would much rather have a cup of tea and a bit of toast."

"Because you have lost so much strength. You shall have the tea and toast after a while," replied Ora.

Notwithstanding Bevvie's objection, she drank the beef tea eagerly and sipped the wine with a relish.

"After all, it is very good," said Bevvie, as she pushed the tray, with its empty glass and bowl, away from her and drew a deep sigh of relief.

She lay quite still for a little while, with her hands thrown up over her head and clasped on her pillow, and then at length she said:

"Oh! that dreadful dream, Ora! I—I dreamed that my husband had married another woman! Oh! it was so realistic! It was so dreadful! But I must tell you all about it, Ora. I shall not be able to get it off my mind until I do."

"Very well, then. Tell me all about it, dear," said Miss Orkney, with a strange misgiving at her heart.

"Well, I dreamed that you and I and baby were driving out in an open carriage, through a handsome street, and we came upon a great crowd of fine carriages. Oh, such a great crowd! and the tower and steeple of a great church rose up above them at a little way off. And it seemed to be a grand wedding. And oh! it did seem so real, Ora. And I thought somebody said: 'Here

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come the bride and groom.' And I looked and saw a beautiful landaulet, lined with white satin and drawn by white horses; and I saw a gentleman dressed in some sort of superb foreign uniform, decorated with foreign orders, and with a white favor on his shoulder, leaning forward and bending over a lovely lady dressed in white silk and orange flowers, whose rosy cheeks and golden hair glowed and gleamed through her fine bridal veil. And then I thought the gentleman handed the lady into the landaulet and got in and seated himself by her side. And when the carriage turned around to drive away, I saw the bridegroom's face. I saw it was that of Fritz! of my own Fritz! And then I screamed and woke up. Fortunately one always does awake at the crisis of a bad dream—woke up to find myself lying quietly in my bed, with you sitting by me—and my dreadful adventure nothing but a dream! But oh! Ora, it has shaken me to pieces," concluded Bevvie, with a shudder.

Ora was deeply troubled. As she looked at her young charge, she saw and realized what a terrible shock the frail creature had received.

Up to this hour Ora had not been able to understand how Bevvie had come to fall into a deep swoon for the first time in her life.

Now she knew that the girl had been stricken down by the sight of the bridegroom of that grand wedding, whose carriages had impeded them in their drive toward Central Park.

Now she remembered that it was just at the instant when the coachman was pointing out to her the newly-

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married pair, that her attention was violently called off by the sudden scream and swoon of her companion, who at once required all her care.

She had not seen the bride, nor the bridegroom, whom Bevvie had seen and believed to be her own husband, and had consequently fallen in a swoon so deep as to obliterate, or confuse, all the incidents of that day, and to leave her, on her recovery, under the impression that the whole adventure had been but a bad dream.

But what was the truth? Had Bevvie really recognized her own husband in the person of that gay bridegroom?

Ora could not tell; she had never seen the face or heard the name of that lion of the hour. All her thoughts, from the moment that Bevvie fell into that swoon, had been so anxiously occupied with that girl that she had not even looked at a paper.

Now she determined to investigate the matter. Of one thing she was absolutely certain, that if there had been any foul play, the deceived woman was not her own Bevvie, but the New York belle. Bevvie was married fast enough, and she held the attested copies of the registry.

All these thoughts passed very rapidly through the mind of Ora, while Bevvie lay resting.

In the midst of all this, the baby in the next room set up a squall.

Ora, without waiting for Bevvie's vehement demand, hurried into the other room and brought the child to his mother.

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She attended to the immediate wants of both, and then, leaving Bevvie cooing to the babe, she went down to the ladies' parlor and rang for the morning papers.

The waiter brought her one, with the apology that it was all that he could get.

But it happened to be the right one; for as Ora sank into an arm-chair and opened it, the first head-line that caught her eyes was—"The Hohenfels-Bullyon Wedding."

"Hohenfels!" she repeated. "Great heavens! Can it be possible that it is the same!"

There was a column of description given to the great wedding—the bride, the groom, the bridesmaids, the dresses, the decorations, the ceremony, the breakfast, the guests, the wedding presents, and finally the embarkation of the happy pair on the steamer that sailed the same afternoon for Havre.

Ora at first rushed through the reading with anxious haste, and next went over it with careful deliberation, scarcely believing that in the first instance she had read aright.

These were the plain, hard facts she gathered from the mass of splendor, luxury and eloquence described:

The bridegroom was Frederick von Hohenfels. The bride was Anastatia, daughter of John Bullyon, the merchant prince. They were married at the hour Ora herself had seen the assembly of carriages, and five hours later they had sailed for Europe!

Ora, as my readers must have observed, was always

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practical even in the midst of her most benevolent eccentricities.

She took the paper up into her own private chamber, cut out the column containing the description of the "Hohenfels-Bullyon Wedding," and inclosed it to Father Johann Muller, Montreal, with a note to this effect:

You, reverend sir, a Christian clergyman, perfectly acquainted with the facts, will take action upon them. Should you have anything to communicate to us, pray write to me directly, and only to me, as I wish to guard the unhappy, forsaken wife from all excitement.

She sealed this letter, threw on her mantle and hat, and went out and dropped it into the post.

Then it occurred to her to call on Bevvie's medical attendant, which was only in the next block, on the same side of the way.

She was very lucky in finding the doctor at home and for the moment disengaged. She told him of Bevvie's strange hallucination, that the events immediately preceding her swoon had been but the phantasmagoria of a dream, and asked him whether it was not best to leave her under that impression.

The doctor thought that it was, and that they must be careful for the present not to enlighten her.

Ora then thanked him for his advice, paid his fee and returned to her hotel.

"I want to get away from this place as soon as pos-

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sible, Ora! I hate it ever since that dream!" said Bevvie, as soon as she saw her benefactress.

"Very well, my dear! We will leave to-morrow, and go as far as Philadelphia. You can stand that much perhaps."

"Oh, yes, Ora."

"But then you must lie in bed all day to-day, so as to be well recruited."

So it was settled.

The next morning they left New York, Bevvie rallying so rapidly under the pleasurable stimulus of this journey that they went all the way to Washington the same day and arrived at the Rugby late the same evening.

"It is well we have come so soon," said Ora to Bevvie when they were retiring that night, "for the quarter for which I paid the rent in advance for our little house is almost up, and our landlord might be thinking we never meant to return."

Bevvie was too tired and too drowsy to answer, and soon both were asleep.

CHAPTER XV

ORA'S GREAT SURPRISE

THE next morning, after breakfast, Ora, leaving Bevvie to take care of her baby at the hotel, called a hack and drove over to South Washington to inspect her little furnished house.

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It was closely shut up, but looked, on the outside at least, as clean and fresh as ever. The only difference was in the little front garden, where the lilacs, daffodils, jonquils, hyacinths, and other spring flowers had given place to roses, marigolds, wall flowers, dahlias, hollyhocks, and other late summer blooms.

Ora went to the next door to get her key, and was met by the woman of the house with an exclamation of surprise and a broad grin, followed by the words:

"Well, I declare, if it isn't Mrs. Capt. Ogden at last! Why, me and Mr. Abel began to think as you never was a-coming back! I have aired the house every week faithful, so it ain't as damp and musty as you might think; and Burd, he's weeded the garden now and then, not to let it get quite overgrowed."

"I thank you both very much and shall make return in something better than words," said Ora, as she received the key.

She went into her little six-roomed house and found everything all right, except that a little dust had collected since Mrs. Burd's last weekly visit.

She locked it up again and returned the key to her neighbor, saying:

"I shall move in on Saturday. To-day I must send in fuel and groceries, and I must ask you if you would kindly tell me if you know any good reliable colored women I could get for servants. I want two—a cook and a housemaid."

"Well, ma'am, I'll try. There's enough and to spare of 'em living all about here, but a lot of good-for-noth-

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inger creeturs you could not find nowhere," said Mrs. Burd.

Ora returned to her carriage, and on her way to the hotel passed a coal and lumber yard, where she stopped to order a supply of fuel to be sent to No. 3 Locust Row. Once more she stopped on the avenue to order groceries sent to the same place. Then she drove to her hotel, where she found Bevvie placidly playing with her baby.

The next morning Ora was destined to learn a lesson in colored "servant-girlism" that she could never have learned in her native Virginia.

She had scarcely finished breakfast when she was told that a woman wanted to see her.

"Let her come up," said Ora.

In a few moments entered a colored girl about twenty years of age, dressed in the most pitiable of tawdry finery. Such a specimen of the race Ora had never seen in her life.

The girl dropped a courtesy and stood simpering and gently swinging herself from side to side.

"Did Mrs. Burd send you here?" inquired Ora.

"Yes'm," with a simper.

"What is your name?"

"Betsy'm."

"With whom have you lived as servant?"

The negro girl looked confused for a moment and then said:

"Nebber libbed servunt now'eres. I 'longed to de Mungumry fambly 'fo' de wo'."

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"Oh, you did. Well, do you want a place?"

"Yes'm."

"What can you do?"

"Mos' anyfing 'bout de house."

"Can you cook?"

"No'm. Aunt Char'ty she done de cookin' at our house."

"Ah! well, can you wash and iron?"

"No'm. Aunt Moll she used to wash an' ir'n."

"So. Can you make beds, sweep and dust—clean house?"

"No'm. Sa'Ann an' Lizy Jane used to do dem fings."

"Then what can you do?"

"Mos' anyfing 'tall 'bout de house," doggedly but humbly persisted the girl.

"Can you wait at table?"

"No'm; Bell an' 'Gustus Cæsar wait' on table at our house."

"Well, do tell me something that you can do," said Ora, smothering a laugh.

"Hi, mist'ess, I is a-tellin' of yer, ma'am! I kin do mos' anyfing 'tall 'bout de house!"

"What was your occupation at home?"

"Wot was—w'ich, mist'ess?"

"What did you do at the Montgomery house?"

"Oh, mos' anyfing 'bout de house dey wanted of me to do."

Ora laughed aloud, and then, being resolved to have a straight answer, inquired:

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"And what was that?"

"W'y, mist'ess, it was mos' anyfing 'bout de house," reiterated this parrot.

"Like what, now?" inquired Ora coaxingly.

And then came the clear answer:

"Stan' 'hind ole mist'ess' cha'r an' fan her, an' keep de flies offen her, and pick up her ball o' yarn, or her knittin' needle, w'en she drap it," said the girl.

"That was in the summer."

"Yes'm."

"But what did you do in the winter?" inquired Ora.

"Mos' anyfing 'bout——"

"No, no; what did you do for your old mistress?" asked Ora, laughingly, cutting short the formula.

"Oh! stan' 'hind ole mist'ess' cha'r an' han' her de tongs w'en she want to poke de fire, an' pick up de ball o' yarn an' de knittin' needle w'en she drap it, an'—an' —hol' de hanks w'en she gwine to win' it."

"There, now, you see," said Bevvie, "that she is one of these perfectly useless little handmaids, good for nothing but what she has been trained to."

"She is young enough to learn, and if I find her, on inquiry, to be decent, I shall take and train her as a housemaid," replied Ora the eccentric.

"No one but you would ever think of such a thing, Ora."

"If I do not take and train her, she may never be able to learn how to make an honest living," replied Ora.

Then turning to the girl she said:

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"You may come to Mrs. Burd on Saturday for your answer."

The girl courtesied, and on leaving the room she saw a pocket handkerchief lying on the carpet, which she picked up very daintily by one corner and handed to Miss Orkney with a courtesy. Then she went out, silently closing the door behind her.

"You can see by that little act that she does well the little she has been taught to do," said Ora.

"Are you going to let her serve you in all that faded silk and ragged gauze?" inquired Bevvie.

"Certainly not; she shall be properly clothed," replied Miss Orkney.

The door opened once more, and a stout, motherly, respectable-looking colored woman entered, courtesied, and introduced herself by saying:

"Rachel, ma'am, sent by Mrs. Hurd to see if I would suit you for a cook."

Ora liked the modest, straightforward, yet respectful manner of this woman.

"You bring recommendations, no doubt?" said Ora.

"Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Burd knows me well, and my late marster, Mr. Clovis Laurie, will certify to me."

"Well, how much wages do you get?"

"Well, ma'am, I dunno," said the woman. And then, with sudden assumption of dignity quite unlike her former manner, and rather amusing, she added: "Fax is, ma'am, I dunno nuffin 'bout dis yere gwine out to service. I war born and raised in my ole marster's house, an' nebber had no call to go out an' work for my libbin'

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like de common herd till de guvmint went an' masticated all us colored people, whedder or no, and ole marse had his feelin's hurted, an' got mad, and said how he wor not gwine to hab no masticated niggers roun' him, so he turned us all out'n doors to get our libbin' bes' way we could—jes's if we dem could help bein' masticated—and he hired a whole passil o' w'ite trash to wait on him, w'ich didn't know none o' his ways; but ole marse mighty queer in his temper sometimes. An' dat's de reason, ma'am, w'y I's cast out on de wide world to work for my libbin'. Wouldn't a minded bein' masticated ef guvmint had 'vided for us too! An' so, ma'am, I ralely dunno nuffin 'tall 'bout wages, nebber havin' been usen to de like."

"How have you lived, then, since you were emancipated?" inquired Ora.

"Jes f'om han' to mouf, ma'am—takin' in washin', i'onin', an' findin' all de soap an' starch an' firewood, and totin' all de water, an' not gettin' paid half de time. So I make up my min' to go out for a cook, w'ich was my work at ole marster's. An' he kin reecommen' me for it."

"Where does he live, Rachel?" inquired Ora.

"In Wash'ton, ma'am. No fader off. Here's his 'dress, ma'am," continued the woman, drawing from her pocket a slip of paper and handing it to the young lady.

"Very well, Rachel. You can go to Mrs. Burd's on Saturday for your answer. I think very likely that I shall engage you, and meantime you can inquire among

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your friends and neighbors what a cook's wages should be," said Ora.

The woman dropped a half humble, half dignified little courtesy, and left the room.

"Well," exclaimed Bevvie, speaking now for the first time, "they say 'it takes all sorts of people to make up the world,' and we have just been interviewed by two of the sorts. Think of that first one who 'could do mos' anyfing 't all 'bout de house,' which, when examined into, proved to consist in standing behind her old mistress's chair to pick up dropped balls of yarn."

"Yes, Bevvie; but see, on the other hand, how many well trained servants there are among these freed men and women."

"And then this last visitor, evidently one of the well trained servants you mention; but just think of her indignation at being emancipated and sent out to get her own living, whether or no."

"An exceptional case, dear Bevvie. This Rachel evidently had a most comfortable home and a very good time in the service of the old master, to whom she must have been much attached. But think, my dear, of the thousands to whom freedom brought relief and happiness."

"I only wish old Mr. Elijah Mossop had been here to witness this last interview," exclaimed Bevvie.

Ora laughed aloud in her hearty way at the picture of Uncle 'Lijah so called up.

Many more applications for places in her small house-

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hold did Ora receive, but to each one she was obliged to reply that she believed she was suited.

On Saturday she moved into her little house, and engaged the two colored women, Rachel and Betsy, as cook and housemaid.

As the days went on, Ora became very anxious to hear from Canada, and went every day to the post office to inquire for letters.

One day early in the next week a letter was handed her.

It was not from Father Muller, however. It was a large, official-looking letter, covered all over with post marks, directions, erasions, and redirections.

As she paused to examine these, she saw that this letter had originally been mailed from San Francisco a month before; that it had followed her from Richmond to Umbra, thence to Washington, thence to Montreal, thence to Washington again.

She went up to a window near the entrance of the post office and opened the strange missive.

If the mysterious letter had astonished her, the news it brought transfixed her with amazement.

Her correspondent was the firm of Jephson & Striker, attorneys-at-law, San Francisco. They informed her that their client, the late Pendleton Orkney, of Santa Agnetta, had died there on the 15th of last May, leaving an estate in the mines estimated at ten millions of dollars, and a will by which he had constituted his dearly beloved niece Oresta, only child of his deeply lamented brother Orestes Orkney, sole heiress.

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Ora looked around for a chair to sit down upon. She needed a seat just now more than she needed ten millions of dollars.

Seeing none, she rested her head and elbows on the window sill, and tried to steady her whirling brain.

Ten millions of money!

Her Uncle Pendleton Orkney! That black sheep, Pen. Orkney! That bad boy, Penny, who had run away from home so many years ago, and who, unlike all the other bad pennies in the world, had never come back —had never even been heard of since, and whom everybody believed to have come to so bad an end that it had better not be inquired into.

And now——!

It took at least fifteen minutes before even the level-headed, well-balanced, self-controlled Ora could get over her amazement. But the girl was prompt and practical, as has been said.

She rallied herself, and taking the letter, she went out of the post office and went into the nearest bookstore, where she bought a packet of commercial cap and large envelopes and sealing wax, and then asked the privilege of sitting down to write a few lines.

Her note to her attorneys in Richmond was brief and direct. She merely wrote—"I have just received the inclosed letter. Please see to it for me."

She placed the whole in a large envelope, which she sealed and directed to Messrs. Irvine & Dent, Attorneys-at-Law, Richmond, Va.

Then Ora went home and told Bevvie all about it,

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making that tiny woman's big brown eyes grow bigger than ever.

"But don't let us talk about it, dearest dear. Somehow it makes my heart ache, as with a burden greater than I can bear," said Ora, as she threw off her hat and dropped into an easy chair.

Bevvie looked solemnly at her benefactress for a few moments, and then said, quite seriously:

"But now, if you could find some gentleman to marry you and help you to bear the burden."

Ora looked at Bevvie and broke into one of her heartiest laughs, as she said:

"I am afraid that would be very hard to do, my dear."

"I will never make a suggestion to you again, Ora. You almost always laugh at them," said the girl, with an injured air.

"Ah! dear child, if you only knew how little cause I have to laugh, you would not mind my laughing now and then, even at your own expense," said Ora, with a sigh, given to the remembrance of Conrad Orkney's stern silence and her own loveless lot.

In a moment Bevvie's arms were around her neck, and

They kissed again with tears.

Days passed; no olive branch was held out by the unrelenting lover; no letter came from the confidential priest; no news arrived of the whereabouts of the mysterious bridegroom, Frederick von Hohenfels.

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CHAPTER XVI

A LABOR OF LOVE

Some high or humble enterprise of good
Contemplate till it shall possess thy mind,
Become thy study, pastime, rest and food,
And kindle in thy heart a flame refined.
Pray Heaven with firmness thy whole soul to bind
To this thy purpose—to begin, pursue,
With thoughts all fixed and feelings purely kind;
Strength to complete and with delight to review,
And grace to give the praise where all is ever due.
—Carlos Wilcox.

Letters came from Messrs. Irvine & Dent, accepting the important trust that Miss Orkney had placed in their hands, but expressing a wish for a personal interview and a regret that a great pressure of business must prevent them from coming to Washington earlier than on the 1st of August.

"I am very glad of this last, for I am sure I don't want either of them here," thought Ora, as she read her letter, at the post office, as usual, for the only address she ever gave to her correspondents was there, where she always called in person for her letters.

"Bevvie, dear," she said, as soon as she reached home and found herself before her protégé—"Bevvie, would you mind staying here alone, with the baby and the servants, for two days, while I go a journey?"

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"Why, no; of course not, Ora. But where are you going?" inquired the younger woman.

"Oh, to Richmond; on business connected with that pestiferous fortune which has been left me, and which I no more want than I do five hundred bonnets or two thousand pairs of boots."

"Oh, if the fortune troubles you, give it away. You'll find plenty willing to take it," retorted Bevvie.

"Oh, no doubt; but the gift would not save me this trouble and would add another," laughed Ora.

Then, with her usual promptitude of action, she sent Betsy out to bring a carriage from the nearest livery stable, and while the girl was gone, she packed a carpet bag for her journey, and instructed Bevvie as to her conduct during her (Ora's) absence.

An hour later Ora started by the afternoon express for Richmond, where she arrived late that night.

She went to the family hotel where she had stopped with the Pendletons the preceding autumn.

Directly after breakfast the next morning, she took a carriage and drove to the office of Messrs. Irvine & Dent, who were her attorneys, as they had been her father's before her.

She found both the lawyers in, and much surprised to see her. As the hour was so early no other client was with them, so that they were for the time being quite at liberty to give Miss Orkney and her affairs their full attention.

She answered a few questions, and put a few others,

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and ended by explaining her own wishes, and executing a power of attorney authorizing them to act for her.

This business being over for the present, Mr. Dent took from his table drawer a letter and said:

"This comes from Hall-in-Umbra, inclosed in one to us. We received it only a few moments before you entered, and we intended to forward it to you by the first mail."

Ora bowed, and opened the letter, which read as follows:

HALL-IN-UMBRA, July 15, 18—

MISS ORKNEY: Not knowing your present address, I send this letter to be forwarded by your attorneys. Having received notice to vacate these premises at the close of the year, which is also the close of my lease, I feel the less hesitation in announcing to you that certain conditions about the dwelling, for which no one can account, and which no one has been able to remedy, have rendered it impossible for my family to remain on the premises a day longer than it will take us to get away. We shall, therefore, go on the 20th of this present month, leaving also nearly half a year of my term unexpired, but I shall hold myself bound for the rent money up to the first of January; if you require it under the circumstances, I shall pay it at that date.

Respectfully, M. KEMPTON.

"Will you read that letter, Mr. Dent?" said Ora, passing the epistle to the lawyer.

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He took it with a bow, read and returned it, saying:

"It is substantially the same as the one we have from the same quarter."

"I am very glad he is going, for I am very anxious to be settled in my own home, and I do not want the rent for the last half year. Please write and tell him so, Mr. Dent. But I do wonder what is the matter with the house? He does not say in my letter. Does he write more plainly in yours?" inquired Ora.

"He speaks vaguely of 'disturbances.' He dares not put the superstition in plain words, but, my dear young lady, the negroes down there are not so reticent. They have spread the report that the old hall is haunted," replied the lawyer, with a laugh.

"Haunted? What folly!" exclaimed Ora.

"Egregious folly! But it has turned your tenant, who is usually a hard-headed, sensible man, out of the house at the willing sacrifice of half a year's lease."

"He shall not lose that! I am too glad to get into my house! But how did you hear this report, Mr. Dent?"

"My dear young lady, I was down in that neighborhood in June, on some important business, with old Squire Goodwin, and while I staid at his house, the girls—you know what a crowd of them there are—entertained me with accounts of the disturbances at Hall-in-Umbra, as they had heard them from the Kempton family, who called them 'spiritual manifestations,' and from the servants, who called them, in their plain talk,

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'ghosts.' That is all! I paid no more attention to the nonsense than politeness absolutely required."

"Of course not! And I fancy a few repairs on rickety doors and windows, and a little rat poison, will soon exorcise the ghosts!" replied Ora.

And after the completion of her business with Messrs. Irvine & Dent, she bade them good-by and went back to her hotel to luncheon.

She felt strongly inclined to send a card to her cousin, Mr. Conrad Orkney, whose law office was in a first floor front of the hotel. But considering the circumstances of his estrangement from her, she concluded that it would be infra dig. to do so, and she refrained.

Two hours later she was on the express train flying toward Washington, where she arrived very late that night. She took a hack at the station and drove directly home, however, to find Bevvie and the two negro women still up—keeping each other company in the parlor, because they were lonesome without the young mistress.

Ora sent them all to bed and followed their example.

Early the next morning Ora burst into Bevvie's room, where the young mother was washing and dressing her babe, and exclaimed:

"I would not tell you the news last night, darling, for fear it would keep you awake, but we are going immediately to Hall-in-Umbra! Oh! think of that! Such a delightful place at this season of the year."

"But—I thought we had to stay here until your ten-

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ant should leave on the first of January. I thought that was why you took this house."

"Quite true, my darling, but you see 'circumstances alter cases,' and my tenant having become dissatisfied with the place has left it. He went away on the 20th; so I shall write to-day to our old friend, Squire Goodwin, and ask him to hire some men to clean the house and fit it up with the same old furniture that has been packed away so long in the old disused barn! Oh, are you not glad, my dear Bevvie?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the girl.

"I know that Squire Goodwin, dear old soul, will not only engage the laborers to do this, but he will see to everything himself, and no old bedstead or bureau will be replaced in position until it has been thoroughly cleaned and polished. Oh, Bevvie! I am so glad to go! I am so tired of a narrow house and a city street! I so long for the roomy old hall and its surroundings of rolling hills and waving woods! Oh, Bevvie! I am so glad!"

"You will restore the hall, of course! I mean remodel and modernize it; put in balconies and bay windows, and water and gas pipes—you know you can afford to have private gas works, especially in such a rich coal region as yours is—and you will refurnish it! You will make Hall-in-Umbra Hall-in-Light, a princely palace, and the wilderness around it to bloom and blossom as the rose. You will——"

"I will do nothing of the sort! Not a thing will I change! Oh, Bevvie, I lived the first five years of my

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life at Hall-in-Umbra, with my dear father and mother! I have such deep, delicious memories of that time, I long to live it over again, as well as I may! I long to dream down out of my womanhood into my childhood again! to roll and rest and revel in it again! I can only do it amid familiar objects of that time! Come, Bevvie! Let us be up and doing!"

Preparations for removal were begun that very day.

Ora wrote to Squire Goodwin, begging him to see to the refitting of her house. She also wrote to her Aunt Mossop at Owlwood Farm, saying that she was about to take possession of Hall-in-Umbra, and to make her future home there in the house of her forefathers; that she would like first to pay a short visit to her dear relatives at the old familiar farm, if they would kindly welcome her and her family, "for," she wrote, "I have adopted another child which I mean to bring up as my own, unless it should be claimed by its parents. Now do not scold me for this, dear auntie, for, you see, since my accession to fortune I have more money than I know what to do with, and so I am able to adopt a whole asylum full of children if I wish."

This letter brought a reply from Mrs. Mossop, in which that good woman soundly lectured her niece for what she called her (Ora's) oddity.

Leave these orphans and these foundlings in the asylums that Christian people have built for them, where they will be well taken care of and brought up to work, and don't you be exposing yourself to remarks

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by fetching any of them home with you, at least not to Owlwood, for I don't think as your Aunt Countie would stand it—I don't indeed.

In course we should be glad to see you, my dear; and we don't begrudge you the fortune, for all that our brother Penny made a bridge over both of our noses to make you his sole heiress, and never remembering his sisters even to the value of a mourning ring; for we have got enough to carry us home, I thank Heaven, and we don't covet nobody's goods.

And so, as I said, we shall be glad to see you, if you come free of encumbrances.

Why could not you have got a pug, or a poodle, or even a parrot or a monkey for a pet?

We would not have objected to them; but a baby!

People will say how you are crazy, Oresta Orkney, and maybe they would be about half right.

Ora finished her aunt's letter with the simple remark:

"This settles it."

Later on she said to Bevvie:

"We shall not take Owlwood Farm on our way. We shall go direct to Hall-in-Umbra."

"Oh, I am glad of that!" said Bevvie. "If I were to stay there several days, Miss Countie's sharp eyes would be sure to find me out. I might nurse baby ever so secretly, and we might even make such a show with the nursing bottle, but we could not keep the secret

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from Miss Countie as we have kept it from these two stupid darkies and from the unsuspicious neighbors."

"It will certainly be easier to keep our secret if we also keep our distance from Aunt Countie," laughed Ora.

And she sat down and wrote to Mrs. Mossop, thanking the good woman for her conditional invitation, and saying that she should accept it as soon as she had seen her "family" settled comfortably at Hall-in-Umbra.

Preparations now went on rapidly. Ora had a talk with her two serving women, who were clamorous with grief at the thought of losing their good home.

Miss Orkney offered to take them with her into the country, if they had had enough of the town, and if they should be willing to go. Both hesitated, but finally agreed to "try it for a few monfs."

Ora paid her rent to the end of the second quarter, and induced her landlord to take back the furniture he had sold her, which was just as good as new, at half of its first price.

Her bed and table furniture, together with the window curtains and the wardrobe of her party, she had carefully packed into boxes and dispatched as freight to Snowden Station, about five miles from the hall; and so, on the evening of the last day in July, she locked up the dismantled little house, gave the key to her next door neighbor, put her family, her servants and herself, with half a dozen capacious hand bags, into two carriages and repaired to her favorite family hotel for the night.

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From the hotel she mailed a letter to good old Squire Goodwin, requesting him to see that a wagon should be sent from the Hall-in-Umbra to meet her at Snowden Station, on the evening of the third, when she expected to be at her journey's end.

Late that night she took a carriage and drove to the post office to see if by any chance there should be letters for her by the last mail.

To her surprise and satisfaction, she received a letter with the Montreal post mark.

Opening it in haste, she found, as she had expected to find, that it was from Father Muller.

The priest began by saying that he had but that day returned to his charge from a distant part of the dominion, to which he had been sent by the bishop to fill the place at the altar of a brother who had been temporarily prostrated by illness.

He wrote that on his return home he had found Miss Orkney's letter awaiting him, and that he had read it and its inclosures with the greatest surprise and distress. Though the proof seemed "strong as Holy Writ," he could not give it his full confidence; though all circumstances seemed to stamp Frederick von Hohenfels as a renegade to honor and to religion, he could not believe him to be such. Though he had not heard one word from Germany on the subject, he still hoped and believed that they should sooner or later receive intelligence that would clear up all the mystery of this seeming neglect and cruelty.

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As for the young wife's apparent recognition of her own husband in the person of that new bridegroom who even bore that husband's name and title, she might have been misled by a strong resemblance; and the man himself might have been an impostor, pretending to a rank to which he had no right. Such impostors were by no means uncommon in American circles.

He could not believe his princely boy Fritz to be so deeply dyed a sinner as this charge would make him.

As for himself, he felt so deeply interested in this affair that he should ask leave of absence to go to Germany, and he should personally inquire into the truth.

Such was the purport of the good priest's letter, written, however, in his usual idiom of placing "the cart before the horse."

As this letter brought no news of the absent husband, Ora thought it best not to show it to Bevvie, who still regarded the episode of the wedding parade as a dream, and who now sank into a state of placid resignation, if not of positive happiness.

But Ora sat up that night, after all her party had gone to bed, to answer Father Muller's letter, to thank him for the interest he had taken in his protégé's affairs, and to ask him to write to her as soon as he should have anything of importance to communicate, and to direct his future letters to her address at Hall-in-Umbra, Lowe Umbra, Rockbridge County, Va.

This was the last business Ora did in Washington.

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The next day's rising sun found her and her party speeding along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad on their way to Hall-in-Umbra.

CHAPTER XVII

WELCOMING

It was near the close of a warm August day that Ora and her party, speeding westward by the Baltimore & Ohio express train, reached the Junction, where they left the main line for the new branch road.

This took them down the deep valley of the Umbra, past the village of Upper Umbra, past the Owlwood Farmhouse, and over that very spot of ground upon which, five months since, the young forsaken wife, in her suicidal madness, had thrown herself before the rushing train, and from which Ora Orkney, at the risk of her own life, had snatched the intentional self-murderer.

It was dusk when they neared the spot. The Umbra, low at this season, looked darker than ever at the bottom of the deep bed, the forest-crowned mountains gloomier. There was no sign of life but the glimmer of lights that came through the trees far up the banks, and that Ora recognized as from the evening lamps of Owlwood Farm. Bevvie shivered and shook as with an ague fit.

"What is the matter with you?" anxiously inquired Ora.

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" 'Some one passing over my grave,' " replied Bevvie, with a sickly smile. Then she whispered rapidly—"Oh, you know, Ora! This whole train rushing over what might have been—but for you—my horrible death place!"

"Hush, hush, for heaven's sake!" breathed Ora.

They were speeding on at express time, and soon left the scene of that unacted tragedy behind.

It was quite dark when they reached Snowden Station, where the train stopped only twenty-five seconds to discharge and receive passengers, baggage, freight and mails.

Ora, Bevvie, baby and servants tumbled out of the cars and on to the dimly lighted platform, in great hurry and confusion, grateful that they had escaped with whole bones, and overjoyed to find Squire Goodwin there in person to meet them.

"Oh! how good of you to come, 'Marse Tomfilius!' " exclaimed Ora, between jest and earnest, laughing and crying, as she frankly received the old gentleman's kiss.

("Marse Tomfillius" was the name by which all the colored folks called Mr. Theophilus Goodwin.)

"And I am right heartily glad to be here to meet you and welcome you back, you runaway! And quite overjoyed with the certainty of having you for a neighbor. But see here, you gypsy, what will your future spouse have to say to these sudden flights of yours, eh?" chuckled the old fellow, as he patted the girl's head.

The thunder of the train, which was now again start-

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ing on its way, prevented Ora from replying until the uproar had died away in the distance. Then she said:

"'My future spouse' may say just what he pleases, provided I ever take a future spouse, which is not likely to happen unless I first get a softening of the brain."

"What, what, what! You don't mean to tell me that you, a beautiful young woman, contemplate passing your life in a state of single blessedness!" exclaimed Mr. Goodwin.

"'Single blessedness'? Single blessedness, quotha? No, indeed; but in double, treble, quadruple, multifarious blessedness. Look here; I must introduce my family. My adopted daughter, Belvidera—but you know her. My adopted son, Frederick. You must make his acquaintance later," said Ora, as she presented the mother and child.

"Now, it is not possible you have taken to——" The squire was about to add, "raise another orphan," but remembering the personal presence of Bevvie, he stopped short, shook hands with her cordially, patted the baby's cheek, and told the woman Rachel, who carried him, to mind how she walked.

"And now, my dears, that the track is clear, we will go on to the wagons. Bob, do you and Tom see that you get every one of those trunks and boxes and bundles on to the ox-cart, do you hear?" he called to his black aids, as he gave one arm to Ora and the other to Bevvie to take them along the rugged path that led to the end of the country road on which he had left the wagons.

This road was so dark, not only from the night, but

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from the thickly overhanging branches of the trees, that but for the large lantern carried by a boy in front, they could scarcely have seen their way.

The squire stopped his party where two vehicles were dimly visible, one a strong cart to which was harnessed a pair of sturdy oxen; the other a very plain covered wagon, to which were harnessed two stout mules.

"Why, Mr. Goodwin! You have brought your own teams here to meet us!" exclaimed Ora in surprise.

"My good child, let me put you and your 'family' into the wagon, and we will talk afterward—as we go along, you know," answered the old man, as he helped first Ora, then Bevvie, then the nurse with the baby, into their seats.

"Now, my good girl," he said to Betsy, "you must go in the ox cart, with the baggage and the boys—they won't eat you. They won't have a chance, for they are coming on behind us."

The girl, half laughing, and muttering something about "not bein' 'feard o' no boys," went to take her place on the ox cart.

"I shall drive this team myself," said the old squire, as he mounted to his place on the front seat and started the mules.

"And now, my dear young lady, to give you some explanation of the liberty I have taken in coming here to meet you in person and with my own teams," said the squire, as they jogged slowly along the wooded road above the railroad track.

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"The 'liberty,' Mr. Goodwin? Why, it was an exceeding great kindness," warmly responded Ora.

"It was a necessity, my dear, and that is really all about it. A lady orders me to send wagons and horses to meet her at the train on a certain evening——" began the squire; but Ora interrupted him.

"Not 'orders,' but requests you, dear Mr. Goodwin," she said.

"A lady's requests have the force of commands to Theophilus Goodwin, my dear. Well, but where were the wagons and horses to come from, then?"

"I thought from Hall-in-Umbra," again interrupted Ora.

"My good child,, did you perhaps think that the wagons and horses had been packed away in the old corn house along with the bedsteads and bureaus, when the place was let? Not at all, my dear. The live stock, including teams of all sorts, were sold to the incoming tenant, who took what was left of them away with him when he went out."

"Oh, dear, yes, of course—I ought to have known that!" sighed the girl.

"So there was nothing for it but for me to have my own teams harnessed up and—as I did not choose to have your precious necks risked by any careless driving over these confounded roads, I came for you in person. And now, young lady, do you know where I am taking you to-night, eh?" he asked, turning his head to face Ora, who was behind him.

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"To Hall-in-Umbra, of course," replied Ora, confidently, though somewhat puzzled by the question.

"Not at all. I will take you there to-morrow, if you insist on going. But for to-night, I am taking you to my old home, which is only half the distance, and where my girls are all expecting you with the greatest eagerness," chuckled Mr. Goodwin.

"Oh, squire, this is making too much trouble for our sakes," exclaimed Ora.

"Nonsense! Fiddle-de-dee! Trouble indeed! We like visitors. True, we don't do as an old friend of mine down the country used to do—keep a negro boy sitting on a fence at the crossroads to waylay travelers and compel them to come that we may be amused; but, you see, we catch 'em this way sometimes."

"Mr. Goodwin, you are so kind to us that I know not what to say to you; but please to believe that I thank you very, very much," replied Ora, warmly.

"Tut, tut, my dear. Now here we are at the ferry. I told old Nutt not to keep us waiting, and sure enough, here he is with the flat-boat on this side," said the old gentleman, as the twinkling lights on the boat reflected in the river caught his sight.

He held in the mules and drove carefully down to the water's edge and thence upon the ferryboat.

"A fine night, squire!" said Ned Nutt, taking off his hat to the party.

"Yes, yes, a fine night! We can see that it is so now, with that clear dark sky and countless bright stars reflected on the river, but bless me if we could tell what

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sort of a night it was coming through the woods! No, Nutt; don't get ready to go yet. Wait for the ox cart with the luggage; it is just behind."

In fact, the ox cart now came in sight, slowly crawling down the road and on to the boat.

And then they started and quickly crossed the river, where, at Lower Umbra, the ferryboat house and the ferryman's cottage stood.

They did not stop here. The old squire drove straight off the boat on to the road, and turning sharply around, drove along the side of the river in a southerly direction for about a mile, and then, turning from the river, drove through a thick wood to an opening, where, surrounded by outhouses, stood the substantial farmhouse to which some genial forefather had given the attractive name of "Welcoming."

It was built of red sandstone, in the strong, simple, spacious style of the dwellings of that locality—two stories in height, with a broad hall and four large square rooms on each floor, the whole topped by a steep roof, in which was the old-fashioned attic. The front of the house presented two dormer windows in the roof; five straight windows in the upper story, and four ditto, with one double door in the middle, in the lower story.

For the rest, the house was deeply shaded with trees.

There was a hospitable show of lights in the open windows, and when Mr. Goodwin drew up before the double doors, these doors flew open and a bevy of girls in white dresses flew out to welcome the travelers.

"Here they are! Here they are!" joyously exclaimed

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Mr. Goodwin, as he sprang from the wagon and lifted out, first Bevvie, then Ora, and lastly the baby and the nurse, almost into the arms of the group of girls, still repeating: "Here they are! all my lasses anxious to see you! Cynthia, Jessie, Laurel, Myrtle, Pink, these are our friends, Ora and Bevvie! I have brought them captive to the house."

The young ladies received the travelers with warm embraces and kisses.

"And whose lovely, lovely little darling is this? Is it the new adopted child I have heard Mrs. Mossop talk about?" said Cynthia, as she lifted the baby from the nurse's arms to carry it into the house.

"Yes; that is my last eccentricity, Cynthia. I adopted that child out of a Canadian convent," answered Ora.

"My dear, if you had any unprincipled relation interested in handling your money, you might easily be convicted of insanity and shut up in a mad-house," said Miss Jessie, the next sister.

"Oh, I dare say. I dare say. I am quite conscious of—let us call it oddity, my dear."

"But it is such a sweet oddity," put in Laurel, who was hovering over the baby in Cynthia's arms.

"Now do come into your room. You won't have to climb a stair. Your room is on this floor," exclaimed Myrtle, throwing open a door on the right of the hall, and showing the guests into what was called, in family parlance, "the parlor bed chamber."

"And tea will be ready in half an hour," added Pink,

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as the two travelers, led by Cynthia, passed into the parlor bedroom.

It was a very spacious chamber, with two white-draped beds in it, and four white-curtained windows, namely, two in front and two at the end. The floor was covered with straw matting, and the furniture was of curled maple wood. All the coloring of the chamber was, therefore, white and yellow, and the effect was clear and cool.

Ora and Bevvie washed their faces, combed their hair, put on clean collars and cuffs, and they were soon ready to go on to the parlor. And now it is time to give a few brief words of explanation in respect to this genial family.

Theophilus Goodwin was a widower and the father of five girls, whose ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-three. It had been his whim to name his daughters after flowers—not Rose, Lily or Violet, which he said were much too common, but Hyacinth, Jessamine, Laurel, Myrtle, and Pink. Three of the girls retained their names as given, but Hyacinth and Jessamine became Cynthia and Jessie.

These sisters bore a very strong family resemblance to each other; all having the same plump form, of medium height, the same fair, round, rosy faces, kindly brown eyes, and curly brown hair. They were even more attached to each other than sisters usually are, and it is scarcely too much to say that they all adored their father.

With but five years between the ages of the eldest and

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the youngest there seemed very little difference in the girl themselves. Cynthia, the eldest, aged twenty-three, was considered the prettiest, and they all seemed to strangers to be about eighteen years old.

The old squire himself was a very fine looking man of sixty; tall, broad-shouldered, full-chested, with large features of the Roman type, a grand head, with a full growth of iron gray hair, that had rather a rebellious way of standing on end like General Andrew Jackson's, and a long, iron gray beard that covered the whole of the lower half of his face and rolled down upon his chest.

His dress was always daintily clean, but in every other respect shabby, rusty, threadbare, and white at the seams; shoes and gloves always too large and loose even for his large feet and hands.

His countenance, his whole personality, revealed the most careless self-forgetfulness and the most eager interest in all others.

He had the most tender and benevolent heart that ever beat in the bosom of a man.

He was constantly imposed upon, of course; but a lifetime of imposture had not soured his temper, or hardened his heart, or cooled his zeal in the service of his fellow creatures.

Even his simple-hearted young daughters saw all this.

So indulgent a master had he been, so utterly, through his tenderness, was he at the mercy of his own slaves, that when the proclamation of the emancipation had freed the latter, his daughters came to him in solemn

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procession and humorously congratulated him on his acquired liberty.

But they adored him; and very few of his colored people had left his service when they were free to go. Where, indeed, could they have gone to have such an easy time?

There was only one thing that the squire could not do, even to please another. He could not marry a second time. He loved the wife who had gone before him to the better world, and who was, as he confidently believed, waiting for him there. He had no vanity, but he could not blind himself to the fact that two women were drawn to love him with a love that made it impossible for them to wed any other man.

One of these was Miss Constantia Orkney, who, for love of Theophilus Goodwin, had remained single all her life.

Another was a young widow with an only son, whom she wished to grow up like Squire Goodwin. She died, "but not of love," while her son was at the medical college.

The squire secretly sighed over these infatuations, and said to himself that he hoped and trusted both maiden and widow would meet their true mates in the upper world, where his wife was waiting for him.

And his manner to Miss Orkney was always most deferential and deprecating, as if he were forever apologizing and asking pardon for some understood but unspoken offense; and he always sought opportunities of serving her in every possible way.

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And when the son of the departed widow came to settle in Lower Umbra, to practice medicine there, after the decease of old Dr. Locke, Squire Goodwin took the young man under his special, though secret, protection, and helped him in many unsuspected ways.

Such was the man whom Ora had felt perfectly free to burden with all the services she needed at Hall-in-Umbra, for was it not "the custom of the country" to use him to any extent?

Why, his own daughters declared that

> The birds of the air
> Might roost in his hair

as they liked, and he would never move lest he should disturb them.

These girls also declared that their father was the original of Edmund Lear's amusing picture:

> There was an old man with a beard,
> Who said: "It is just as I feared—
> Two ducks and a hen,
> Four larks and a wren,
> Have all made their nests in my beard.

There were not wanting those who called Theophilus Goodwin "weak;" but these were not among the most discriminating of the community. If he were "weak" in any respect, it was in his extreme reluctance to give pain; or, in other words, he was weak to inflict pain on others, strong to endure in his own person.

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This portrait of Theophilus Goodwin is drawn from memory, not imagination.

Such was the host, who came with a smile and a jest to meet Ora and Bevvie as they issued from the parlor bedroom.

He gave an arm to each—not that it was at all necessary, but because he liked it—and he led them to the dining room, which was in the rear of the parlor, on the other side of the hall.

"And now, my dears, I am going to introduce to you a very fine young fellow, a friend of mine, a very talented young man, who is bound to make his mark in this world. I advise you both to set your caps for him. If he fancied one of my girls he should have her, or I would know the reason why. But somehow or other he doesn't. Maybe it is because he has brown eyes and brown hair like they have—and like does not take to like in love affairs, if in anything else. Such a handsome fellow, my dears! Hush! here he is."

No one was saying a word but the old squire himself, and as he ceased speaking he indicated a young man who came out of the dining room toward them.

He was a very "handsome fellow," of medium size and height, elegant form and graceful bearing. He had regular features, a clear complexion, brown eyes and brown hair, and full flowing brown beard. He was dressed in a black summer cloth suit and white cravat. He looked like a young clergyman.

"Ah! Dr. Leicester! I heard you were here! So glad to see you! See the girls, eh? Yes! Well, let

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me present you to my young friends! Miss Orkney—Dr. Leicester, of Lower Umbra; Miss Boone—Dr. Leicester." The gentleman bowed. The ladies slightly courtesied. The squire said:

"Now let us go in to tea without ceremony."

And he led his young guests into the large, airy, well lighted, but simply furnished dining room, where a long table, covered with a white damask cloth, was set out and laden with a tempting repast of tea, bread, butter, honey, cakes, and fruit.

The five white-robed lasses were all there; and the youngest—where all appeared to be about eighteen, as I said—Pink, sat down at the head of the table.

"There is no law of primogeniture in this house," remarked the squire, after he had said grace—"my girls take turns in presiding, and this is Pink's day. To-morrow will be Cynthia's!"

The tea party passed off very pleasantly, and soon after the guests had gone to the front parlor, Ora, seeing that Bevvie was very tired, pleaded fatigue, and with her companion retired to rest.

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CHAPTER XVIII

AMONG OLD HAUNTS

I look around and feel the awe
  Of one who walks alone
Among the wrecks of former days
  In mournful ruin strown.

I start to hear the stirring sounds
  Among the cypress trees,
For voices of departed ones
  Are borne upon the breeze.

I know that they are happy
  With their angel raiment on,
But my heart is very desolate
  To feel that they are gone.

—PARK BENJAMIN.

ORA awoke early in the morning, and rose quietly, not to awaken the still sleeping young mother and child. She opened one window to look out, but the great trees crowding around the house prevented her from seeing anything except themselves, with glimpses of the blue heavens above and of the green earth beneath.

While she was still standing at the window she heard a very low tapping at her door.

She was not yet dressed, so she went and spoke through the keyhole.

"Who is there?"

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"I, Pink; come to see if I can be of any use to you —dress the baby, or anything," answered the fifth Miss Goodwin.

"Thank you, dear. Wait one moment," said Ora, as she hurried softly across the room, lifted the sleeping baby from the side of the sleeping mother, and laid it on her own bed. Softly as she had withdrawn the babe, and though she had not awakened it, she had aroused the mother.

"What did you do that for?" inquired Bevvie.

"His-s-s-h! Pink is coming in to help us, she says, and my adopted child must be found in my bed," whispered Ora.

And then she hastily threw on a wrapper, and went and opened the door.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, dear," she said, as she admitted the blooming girl, who, in her fresh, figured percale dress, looked as bright as her flower namesake.

"Well, now, what can I do?" she gayly inquired.

"Sit down here and give us your company, dear, while we are putting on our clothes. You wouldn't know how to dress a baby, if you had it to do; would you, now?" demanded Ora.

"Well, no; but you could show me."

"Certainly, I'll 'show' you. Watch me do it," said Ora, with a laugh, as she gathered basin, towels, sponge, and clean clothes on the floor around the low chair, and then took up the baby and sat down with it, and began to make its morning toilet.

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Bevvie meantime had arisen and begun to dress herself.

"Now tell me which of you girls that handsome young doctor is coming to see?" inquired Ora, while she was taking off the baby's nightgown.

"Neither of us. He comes to see papa. Papa has known him ever since he was a boy. He lost his own father so early in life that he does not even remember; and you know that it is said that his mother, the beautiful Mrs. Leicester, was once a sweetheart of papa's—or would like to have been—or something. Anyway, our dear old darling is very fond of the young man, and, I really do believe, would be glad if any of us would get a slight cold, or a touch of malaria, or anything that would justify a professional visit from the doctor and a large fee to him; and I know he would be perfectly delighted to have him for a son-in-law. But you see we disappoint our dear old angel all around. We girls are all too strong and healthy to get sick, even for the sake of giving the young physician a case. And as for him—he does not dream of one of us for a wife. And as we are none of us in love with him, I am very glad that he does not make up to any of us, for if he did papa would worry the life and soul out of the elect lady until she should consent to be made happy; for that is the way in which he would look upon the affair."

"But your father could not be a tyrant. He would never force a daughter into a distasteful marriage."

"'Force!' Bless you, no. Never 'force.' He is the gentlest of human beings. No; he would never force

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anybody to anything. But if Dr. Leicester should ever make an offer to one of us, papa would back his suit, and

Plead, lament, and sue,

as if the case were his own. Fortunately, the young man is not taken with any of us. Bless you, he has played with us from childhood up, and we are too much like his sisters," concluded Pink, with a merry laugh.

Ora finished dressing her baby, and then gave it into the arms of Bevvie, who had meantime completed her own toilet.

"Take the little fellow out to get some of this fresh morning air. And oh, yes! here is one thing you can do for me, Pink of pinks. Take this nursing-bottle out to your housekeeper, and get it filled—half new milk, half hot water, with a lump of sugar in it."

Pink took the bottle, and left the room.

Ora locked the door, and turned to Bevvie.

"Now, quick! sit down and nurse the baby. Oh, this dreadful necessity for concealment! Surely never were two innocent persons placed in such a false position as we are," sighed Ora.

"Oh, dear! it is because you have taken all my burdens upon yourself, Ora," mournfully responded Bevvie.

"Hush, child! I took the whole responsibility of your future—under the Divine Providence—when I, a child of five years, was permitted to adopt you, a babe of five weeks."

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"You had better have left me to my fate."

"I could not have done that, Bevvie."

"Well, then, anyhow, when I—when I—deceived you by going off and getting married in this secret, this fated manner, you had better left me to go—to go—to my destruction in my own way, without compromising your own fortunes, happiness, reputation, everything, for my unworthy sake! Yes, you had much better have let me go to ruin."

"It would have broken my heart, Bevvie. Say no more, dearest. I love you. That is all."

"Ah, but that is not all. And no one knows how this will end. It does not matter so much for me. If I finally come to grief, it will only be my 'folly's meed.' But you!"

"But your child! It matters very much to him how all this shall end with you. And now, Bevvie, talk no more of this. There is only one element in the whole affair that troubles me, and sometimes makes me cry out; and that is the necessity for concealment. There now, let the subject drop."

Bevvie obeyed her monitress, as she always did, and Ora went on with her toilet.

Presently Bevvie laid her satisfied and sleeping baby on the bed, and began to pick up stray night-dresses, combs, and brushes, and put them away.

Pink entered with the nursing-bottle, and said:

"I had to keep you waiting until Aunt Moll washed it with hot water and soda to sweeten it. You ought not to keep milk in the bottle until it sours, she says."

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"Thank you, very much, Pink, dear, but the baby has gone to sleep," said Ora.

"Oh, I am sorry I could not bring it here before. But I will take it back to the kitchen, and tell Aunt Moll to put it in a pan of hot water to keep it warm," exclaimed the girl, as she ran off again with the nursing-bottle.

The breakfast bell rang, and the two young women went into the hall, where they were met by their genial host, who bade them a hearty good morning, and, drawing an arm of each within his own, led them to the dining-room, where all the girls and the young doctor were gathered for breakfast.

Ora wondered at seeing the latter, until, after the morning greetings had passed, Mr. Goodwin said:

"And so, Leicester, as I said last night, I want you to vaccinate every man, woman, and child about the place."

The doctor bowed, but did not pursue the conversation. Breakfast was on the table—a fact that the old squire had seemed to have forgotten in bringing forward unsuitable topics of talk.

After breakfast, the squire, excusing himself to his guests, went around with the doctor to enforce his own commands among the negroes, who, without his presence, would scarcely have consented to the operation.

"Are there any cases of small-pox in the neighborhood?" inquired Ora of her young friends, as, standing on the front piazza, they saw the two gentlemen walk away toward the negroes' quarters.

"Bless you, no," said Hyacinth, laughing.

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"Why, then, this urgent necessity of vaccinating the whole population?"

"Hush, honey! It is only to give the doctor a profitable job. The young gentleman does not suspect the motive, I am sure. In fact, he perfectly agrees with papa that everybody should be vaccinated."

"That is, from his point of view as a medical man, of course."

"Oh, yes! And goodness knows what papa will be up to next. What would you like to do to while away the time, Ora? I would ask you to take a walk in the garden and see our new variety of roses, only the dew is so heavy, as these August dews always are, you know."

"Don't trouble yourself, dear Cynthia. I have no time to while away. I must start for Hall-in-Umbra this morning."

"Oh, Ora! and papa promised us not only that he would bring you here to us last night, but that he would contrive to keep you here."

"Ora, don't go. Why should you go? There is no one in that old hall who wants you," added Jessamine.

"But, my dear girls, sweet as it is to be in your company, I long to be at home. And I must go this morning. I only wait for your father's return from his round with the doctor to ask him to take us to Hall-in-Umbra."

All the sisters chimed in in a chorus of entreaties that it was impossible to silence and hard to withstand.

"Without the least doubt, as soon as ever I get set-

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tled in the old hall, I will come and make you a long visit, and, besides, two or three of you, or as many as your father can spare at a time, must come in turn and stay with me," urged Ora.

"Oh, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!'" retorted Myrtle; "and while we have got you, we wish to keep you."

And so the girls kept up their din of entreaty until the return of the squire and the doctor after a three hours' round.

It was near ten o'clock, and the doctor requested that his horse might be brought to the door.

When this was done he took leave of the family and visitors and rode off.

"And now, dear Mr. Goodwin, will you add to all your other kindnesses to us by driving us home this morning?" gently requested Ora.

"What! Drive you home! Drive a young lady away from my house! Why, I never even drove a profane man away from Welcoming, much less a lady!" exclaimed the old squire, affecting to be very much shocked, indeed.

"Oh, well, if you will not let me have the use of your carriage and horses, we shall have to walk to Umbra," replied Ora, with a sigh of assumed resignation.

"Come now, you will not wound our feelings by leaving us to-day?"

"Indeed, dear Mr. Goodwin, we must go home this morning."

Thereupon the argument dropped by the girls was

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taken up by their father, but all to no purpose, and so at length Ora had her own way.

"Well," sighed the squire, "I suppose I must act on the old proverb,

Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest.

The first is delightful, the second is detestable. And in this special instance it is very like compelling a poor fellow to be his own executioner! It breaks my heart to have you go, and yet I must take you away!"

Then he gave orders to have the horses put to the carriage immediately.

Ora and Bevvie went into the house to pack their traveling bags and put on their bonnets; and these tasks were finished a few moments after the carriage drove up to the door.

The two visitors took leave of their young hostesses, and they parted with many mutual expressions of regret and anticipations of a speedy reunion.

Then the old squire politely handed his two guests into the carriage—Ora holding the infant in her arms—mounted to his own seat, took the reins and drove off.

Their way lay through green lanes that divided the squire's broad fields and meadows from each other, and then along a rough country road, winding around the base of a wooded mountain, and, finally, into a thick forest, where it seemed twilight at noonday.

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CHAPTER XIX

HALL-IN-UMBRA

This was Umbra Wood, in the midst of which stood the old hall to which the situation gave the name of Hall-in-Umbra.

As they drove slowly along through the thick wood, between high walls of dark trees whose branches met and intermingled over their heads, something of a not unpleasant gloom and glamour of the scene made Ora think of the stories she had lately heard of the haunted hall.

"What is all this about the ghosts in Umbra? You promised that you would tell me to-day," she said.

"My dear, I hardly know where to begin telling you," the squire answered.

"When Mr. Kempton first complained of the disturbances, then," suggested Ora.

"But, honey, there were disturbances long before Michael Kempton rented the place. The old negroes who stayed on after the emancipation, and worked under your father's overseer, declare that the place has been haunted almost ever since your father's death."

"Oh! how dare they take such liberty with my dear father's sacred name and sainted memory!" burst forth Ora, in warm indignation.

"My child, they don't presume to say that it is your

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dear father's spirit who 'walks,' as they term it," answered Mr. Goodwin.

"What is it, then?"

"Ah, now you have it. It seems really to be a 'What-is-it'!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Ora, laughing and flushing. "I'll soon exorcise that ghost!"

"Will you? Then you will be smarter than the Kemptons. They really did not want to leave the hall in this lovely weather, and nearly six months before their lease had expired, but they were compelled to go—the ghost ejected them!"

"The ghosts will not eject me, I bet you! But tell me in what particular manner the ghost annoyed the Kemptons."

"I do not know. The members of the family were all very reserved on the subject. Only Mr. Kempton spoke of the continual, persistent nocturnal disturbances which had grown absolutely intolerable, and which rendered it utterly impossible for them to live in the house any longer."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Ora. "Rats scampering behind the wainscoting. Loose shingles rattling on the roof. Creaking doors. Shaking windows. Bah! It will not need

Bell, book and candle

to exorcise these! An ounce of arsenic and a pound of nails will thoroughly do the job."

"I hope so, my dear; I hope so."

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"Why, Mr. Goodwin, you speak doubtfully. I hope you do not believe in the supernatural?"

"I, my dear, certainly not; but I believe in deviltry and in trickery, and am inclined to explained the phenomena at Hall-in-Umbra on those grounds."

"You say that most of the old negroes remain upon the farm?"

"Yes, my dear. First the men worked for small wages and their little homes and provisions under your poor father's overseer; afterward, when the place was rented to Mr. Kempton, they continued on, working on the same conditions for the new tenant. Kempton would have liked to take some of the men with him to the farm he had purchased in Hardy county, but not one of them would leave the land; they are all there now, as ready to serve you as if they had never heard of the emancipation act—and far more firmly fixed to the premises, for nobody can sell or hire them off it, and nobody can induce them to leave it."

"Bless their faithful hearts, who wants them to go? Not I! I hope I shall not miss one old familiar face, though it is sixteen years since I was here last. All that were children then have grown up now. All that were just grown up then are middle-aged now. And those who were middle-aged at that time are growing old at this! Have any of them died, Mr. Goodwin?"

"Not one, my dear! Even Aunt Jenny and Aunt Judy are still living on."

"G-o-o-d—g-r-a-cious!" drawled Ora, with a pro-

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longed note and a stare of astonishment. "You don't say that they are living still?"

"Yes, indeed; they are still living in their little log hut in the woods, and still objects of the kindest care to all the other negroes."

"Why, as far as I can remember backward into my little childhood, they were supposed to be tottering down and ready to topple in the grave. I certainly excepted them when I expressed a hope not to miss any familiar face. I had no hope of ever seeing theirs again. Well, Mr. Goodwin, I suppose it is very selfish in me to say it, but I am very glad to know that they are still living in the old place and that I shall see them again. Are they very infirm and decrepit?"

"They don't seem to be more so than they were some sixteen years ago. They seem to me to have got into the whitleather and fossil age, and to be fated not to die, but to dry up and blow away."

"Oh, Mr. Goodwin, you don't see any difference because you see them so often, and their decline has been so very gradual."

"Perhaps so, Ora, and perhaps also you may perceive a change that is imperceptible to me and others."

"Dear old grannies—they always seemed to my childish mind like people in a fairy tale; and I remember when I should not have been surprised had either of the shriveled old creatures turned into a young and beautiful fairy princess before my eyes. And so, after all these years, I shall miss not one familiar face!"

"Stay, Ora! I said not that! I said that not one

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had died! But, my dear, one, or rather, I may say, two —though the second was irresponsible—disappeared!"

"'Disappeared!' Who was it?"

"Do you remember Hera?"

"Yes, surely; a bright, pretty quadroon girl."

"Well, my dear, after the battle of Black Mountain—that fight was the nearest to us that the war ever came, and all we knew of that at the time was the distant thunder of the cannon that came booming toward us from over the hills and the cloud of sulphurous smoke that rolled to and fro on the horizon behind them—after the battle of Black Mountain, as I was saying, there came some stragglers from both armies, I reckon, for some wore the blue and some the gray, and all were equally in need of soap and water and a change of clothes. Well, not to dwell upon this subject, I will only say that, while these men were about, several of the young women from neighboring plantations vanished —enticed away, it was supposed, by promises of marriage and fine living in the cities. Among the missing was Hera, who disappeared from Umbra, and who took with her her little five-year-old child—I suppose because the child had no other relation in the world to take care of her. At any rate, they have never been seen since two days after the battle of Black Mountain."

"Poor Hera! Poor, dear, silly Hera! I am so sorry! So very, very sorry! Oh, Mr. Goodwin! I would much rather have heard that she was dead!"

"Her case is one of many, my dear! And it is past remedy! And 'what is past remedy is past regret!'

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Here we are at Hall-in-Umbra, my dear!" said the old squire, as he suddenly pulled up his horses before a rustic gate that crossed the road in the thickest part of the forest.

He got out of the carriage, unfastened the gate, swung it wide open, led the horses through, then closed the gate, remounted to his seat and drove on.

Except that they had passed through the gate of the dividing wall they saw no difference in their road, which still wound through woods as thick and dark as those they had left behind.

They drove on for a few minutes longer, and then, in a turn of the road, drew up quite suddenly before a large, square, massive building of dark red stone, with a high-peaked roof and many windows and chimneys, and vine-covered porches, wherever there was an outer door. Ivy ran all over the walls, and the trees crowded around and overshadowed the roof.

"This house is rightly called Hall-in-Umbra," said Mr. Goodwin, as he alighted from the carriage before the front porch, which was almost concealed from view by the thick overgrowth of creeping vines that covered its roof, sides and front.

In an instant, as if they had sprung from the ground or dropped from the sky, a crowd of eager negro women surrounded the old squire, pressing for information.

"'Mornin', Marse Tomfilius! Is de young mist'ess comed home, sar?" inquired a good-looking colored woman of about forty years of age, while all her com-

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panions looked the question that she asked, and bent eagerly forward to hear the answer.

"Yes! She's in the carriage here! Have the two new servants arrived with the luggage?"

"Oh, yes, Marse Tomfilius, sar, dey 'rove dis mornin' 'fore we dem done breakfas'. Now, I want to speak to her. Ay, ay! Dat's her! dat's my young mist'ess. I ain't see her since she was five year old; but I knows her by her likeness to her moder! Lor', if she ain't de werry print of her moder! Miss Ory, honey, don't you know yer ole nuss?" inquired the woman, pressing forward to the door of the carriage.

"Why, to be sure, I know you, Nelie, dear! I should have known you anywhere! And why do you call yourself old? You are not old at forty! And you haven't changed much either, Nelie, except that you have grown a great deal stouter! I am so glad to be with you all again, nurse! And I'm not going to leave you any more! Never any more!" said Ora, holding and fondling the dark hand that she had taken.

"Ain't I proud to hear you say it, Miss Ory! But, Lor' a massy! Wot's dat?" exclaimed the woman in amazement, as a sudden movement of Ora's arm unveiled the young infant who was sleeping on her lap. "I—I nebber eben heerd as you was married, honey!"

"Neither am I married, you goosey-gosling of a Nelie! Nor neither do I ever intend to be married. This is another child that I have adopted. And I mean to keep on adopting children. As fast as one grows up, I'll adopt another. All old maids have pets, you know!

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Most of them like cats, or lap dogs, or cage birds. I like children," gayly replied Ora.

"Umph—humph! Jes so, my young mist'ess; but I wonder wot Marse Conrad gwine to say to all dis here?"

Ora started and bit her lip.

Nelie saw this change in the young lady's countenance, and, with the privilege of her class, continued:

"Umph—humph! Young mist'ess finks po' ole colored nuss don't know nuffin! Jes so! Mebby no little bird nebber comes and tells Nelie nuffin! Oh, no, nebber!"

"Come, come, come, my good soul! Let your young mistress get out of the carriage. Are you going to keep her sitting there all day?" impatiently demanded Mr. Goodwin.

"And here comes Rachel! Take the baby, Rachel! and take it at once into the house," added Miss Orkney, as Nelie gave way and the child's nurse came forward.

But as soon as the young lady alighted, eager negroes crowded around her, eager hands were held out to her, and eager voiced exclaimed:

"How do, Miss Ory! Don't yer know ole Aunt Ailsie?"

"Welkim home, young mist'ess! Yer 'members yer ole Uncle Alick, don't yer?"

"I'se so proud to see yer home agin, Miss Ory! Yer ain't done gone and forgot yer ole Aunt Ca'line, has yer?"

"Mornin' to yer, young mist'ess. Yer ain't gwine to

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pass me by 'dout speakin'! Y' old Uncle Cha'ly, honey, wot used to ride groom to de ole marse! Hi, chile! you 'members me?"

And so on through a crowd of old servants, shaking hands cordially with every one, giving words of warmest recognition to every one, Ora, laughing, worked her way toward the hall door and entered her house, drawing Bevvie after her.

When they had crossed the threshold Ora turned and folded Bevvie in a fervent embrace. And this was the girl's welcome home, more eloquent than words could have expressed it.

Mr. Goodwin had paused to give some directions about the horses, and now followed them into the house.

The hall in which they stood was like the same apartment in so many other country houses—long and broad, with a front and back entrance, a staircase in the middle and side doors leading into the big parlor, the little parlor and dining-room.

Mr. Goodwin opened the door on the left, leading into the big parlor on the right, and the two young women entered a large, bare room, with clean, whitewashed walls, polished yellow pine floor, two tall front windows, with white shades and a tall mirror between them; opposite them, at the back of the room, were two other white-shaded windows, with another tall mirror.

A tall mantelpiece of carved wood, surrounding an open fireplace, now filled with fragrant evergreen boughs, and surmounted in its turn by a long mantel mirror, stood on the side opposite the hall. Stiff, hard,

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high-backed settees were ranged opposite each other against the walls, and were flanked by straight up and down mahogany chairs. A round mahogany table stood in the center of the room, and a few books, rooted out from old chests in the attic, had been arranged on it to give the dreary apartment that home-like look which only old books, a cat, or tea kettle can impart.

Ora instinctively went to see these volumes. They looked moldy and smelt musty; they were bound in leather, printed on yellow paper, and all the s's looked like f's. They were book of the last century, some good, some otherwise.

Ora picked them up, one by one, reading their titles:

"'Letters of Junius.' Who wants to read them? 'Castle of Otranto.' Oh! Bevvie, we will read this! This is good, lonesome, country house, night reading! 'Dr. Syntax.' Bah! 'Parents' Guide.' 'Old English Baron.' We'll read that, too. And all the others seem to be sermons or essays," concluded Ora, as she turned away from the table.

"And now, my dear girl, before I bid you good day, you must tell me what I can do for you," said the squire, as he stood, hat and gloves in hand, before the young lady.

"But you will stay to dinner with us, dear Mr. Goodwin?"

"Thanky, my love. I am sorry that I cannot have the pleasure."

"Please, Marse Tomfilius," pleaded Ora.

"Impossible, my child! I have an appointment with

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my lawyer at my house at two o'clock, and must keep it. Tell me what I can do for you."

"If you can beg, borrow or buy a little carriage and horse for my temporary use until I can get an equipage down from Baltimore or Richmond I shall be very much obliged to you, Mr. Goodwin."

"I will look around and see," replied the old gentleman, as he inwardly resolved to send his own pony carriage from Welcoming.

Then the old squire shook hands with the two young women and went away.

CHAPTER XX

A MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE

"Come, Bevvie, dear, and I will show you the room that I have had fitted up for you," said Ora, as she took the hand of her companion and drew her out of the parlor and up the broad oaken staircase that led to the floor above.

"Here, Bevvie! Here is what in my childhood used to be called the best spare room; it is a front room, over the big parlor, you see, and was always kept for company," said the young lady, as she opened a dark oaken door that admitted them into a very large chamber, with the whitewashed walls, yellow pine floor, tall windows and tall mantelpiece that characterized all the best rooms in the house.

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Between the tall, white-curtained front windows was a white-draped toilet table, on which stood a rather dim and mildewed mirror. In one of the front corners was a triangular washstand, in the other a triangular cabinet.

At the back of the room stood a four-post bedstead with a white tester and valance and white quilt and pillows. There was an easy chair, covered with white dimity, and six other chairs, hard, upright, and uncomfortable. Old, faded Turkey rugs lay, one beside the bed, one before the fireplace, and one before the toilet table.

"This is your room, Bevvie, dear, and when I have had time to furnish it, it will be a lovely room. It has a pleasant prospect, though not an extensive one; trees, trees, trees, everywhere! Waves beyond waves of foliage! Oceans of greenery rolling out as far as the eye can see!"

"It is very refreshing to sight and soul, I think Ora! But—I have been wondering where your cultivated lands are. We, since we left Mr. Goodwin's farm, have seen nothing but deep, dark woods!"

"Yes, of course, my dear. All Umbra Wood. And the house itself is Hall-in-Umbra."

"But where, then, are the gardens, orchards, meadows, fields?"

"They are beyond the thicket of woods at the rear of the estate, where they spread out into many hundred acres of well watered and well cultivated land. The overseer's house and the negroes' quarters are in the midst of them. It was the fancy of the first owner of

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this land and builder of this house to leave the forest unbroken all around it. And all his descendants have followed his plan and allowed the trees to stand. I also like it—yes, better than the most expensively laid out terraces, with arbors, and fountains, and parterres, and all the rest of it. Well, there are your trunks, Bevvie, between the bed and the wall. And there are two large closets, one on each side of the chimney, fitted up with shelves and hooks for your wardrobe. I will send Betsy up to help you to unpack. And you must from this time consider her as your especial attendant," concluded Ora, as she rather hurriedly left the room to avoid the fervent thanks of her young protégé.

Ora made a pious pilgrimage all through the old house, where the old-fashioned furniture had been replaced in the same positions it had occupied before the premises had been let to Mr. Michael Kempton and his family.

Before she had got through, dinner was announced, and she called Bevvie and went into the dining room, where an excellent repast was laid, and where Old Alick, the sometime butler of her father, stood to wait at table.

When the *tête-à-tête* dinner was over, Ora took Bevvie's arm and led her into the little parlor in front of the dining room, and which was called "little" only in contradistinction to the big parlor, which ran the whole depth of the house from front to back. This little parlor was really a good-sized room, and furnished more comfortably than other parts of the house. The floor was

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covered with a Turkey carpet. The walls were wainscoted with oak, and were hung with family portraits.

The chimney and fireplace were built diagonally across the corner of the room, and over the mantelpiece, which was of Italian marble, hung two life-sized bust portraits of Ora's father and mother, the former a handsome, dark-complexioned man, in the uniform of a general in the United States army, the latter a lovely blonde, in blue satin and pearls, the dress made in the fashion of a quarter of a century before. Between the front windows hung another portrait of that wild Uncle Pendelton Orkney, who had run away to Calfirnio so many years before and made a fortune to leave to his niece. And on the side walls hung pictures of gentlemen in the queued hair and clean-shaven faces of King George's reign.

There was a center table, with convenient drawers all around it.

There was a lady's workstand that had been the special property of the late Mrs. Orkney. There were half a dozen chairs, all of different sizes and patterns, to accommodate any taste, and all comfortable.

"This will be our favorite room, I think, Bevvie," said Ora.

But Bevvie did not hear the remark. She was gazing fixedly at the portrait of Ora's mother.

"One might really take this to be your own portrait in a fancy dress, Ora. It is amazingly like you," she said at last.

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"Yes; even I myself see the likeness," said Ora.

Then she rang the hand bell that stood upon the center table.

It was answered by a boy from the hall.

"Go and tell Rachel to bring the baby in here to me," said Ora.

And when the child was brought, and the nurse dismissed, Ora placed the little one in its mother's arms and locked the door.

They spent the remainder of the afternoon in that cozy parlor, and then, after an early tea, they retired to rest.

Ora attended Bevvie to her own room to see that she was comfortable.

Closing the door carefully, she whispered:

"We must be very careful, my dear, that no suspicion is aroused in this neighborhood. I have adopted your child that I may be able to say with truth that he is my adopted child. People must be allowed to believe that he is only my adopted child. That is the reason why I had my own crib brought from the attic and placed by my bed. That is why I have had the baby laid in it by the nurse. Now, then, after all the servants have gone to bed, I will bring the baby to you for the night, and very early in the morning I will come and take him back. Do you understand?"

"Of course I do, and thank and love you more than words can express, dearest dear."

"Good night, till I come for Fred."

"Good night, loveliest love."

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Ora went to her own room, which was the front one on the opposite side of the hall.

This had been her father's and mother's room, and it was furnished now exactly as she remembered it in her childhood. The walls were whitewashed, the pine floor polished. The tall front windows hung with long, white dimity curtains; between these stood a tall mahogany dressing bureau, with a large, swinging looking glass that nearly reached the ceiling. Opposite, at the back of the room, was a large four-post bedstead, with its head against the middle of the wall, and its tester and posts lightly festooned with white dimity and white fringe, to match the white Marseilles quilt with which the mattress was covered. The old-fashioned triangular washstands stood in opposite corners of the front wall —the one between the window and the passage door was her father's, the one between the other window and the fireplace was her mother's. There was a little work table, and low rocking chair, and a large, softly cushioned arm chair covered with white dimity, and four high cane chairs. And there were Persian rugs laid one on each side the bedstead, one before the dressing bureau, and one before the fireplace.

The baby's crib was beside the bed; and near it, in a low chair, sat Nelie, Ora's former nurse, who arose on the entrance of her mistress, and apologized by saying:

"I sent Rachel to bed, ma'am, because she was overdone with fatigue, and I took her place here to watch the baby."

"Quite right, Nelie. I am glad you did, for I wish

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to speak with you," replied the young lady, as she went and closed the door, though there was no one to listen.

When she had done this, and had thrown herself into the large easy chair, she inquired:

"In what capacity did you live with the Kemptons, Nelie?"

"I was cook, ma'am."

"What did they give you?"

"Eight dollars a mont', ma'am."

"Well, Nelie, I will give you ten, if you stay with me."

"My goodness, Miss Ory, honey, I nebber t'ought to go 'way f'om you. But de idea of workin' for you for wages, 'stead o' love! I couldn't do it, ma'am."

"Yes, you can, and you must. You must rise with the rising race, Nelie. And now that that is settled, tell me about these disturbances that drove my tenants away."

"De ghoses you mean, ma'am?" whispered the woman in an awe-stricken tone, as she glanced furtively over her shoulder.

"Yes; the 'ghosts,' as you call them.

"Well, honey, I nebber seed nuffin nor likewise heerd nuffin unnateral myse'f. But, den, me an' old Aunt Caroline slept in de room ober de kitchen, an' dere nebber was no 'sturbances dere. But as for de w'ite folks—oh, I tell yer!" said Nelie, shaking her head.

"What did they see or hear, then?"

"Oh, honey, please don't ax me. Dey nebber told me nuffin—not perticular they didn't. But it was night

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after night. Dere was no sleepin' in de house. An' nobody nebber could fine out wot was de matter."

"I'll wager that I'll find out what is the matter. Well, I will not keep you up any longer, Nelie. Go to bed."

The woman made a prim courtesy and left the room.

Ora remained seated in the large easy chair beside the crib, thinking over all that she had heard, and wondering what the solution of the mystery would be, until at length all careful thought subsided, and she fell into an ineffable calm, as she yielded to the influence of the heavenly sphere enveloping sleeping infancy.

How long she had sat thus she herself could not have told—longer than she had intended, no doubt—when she was startled by the soft sound of rushing raiment, followed by a quick, nervous tapping at her door.

"Who is that?" she cried, more disturbed in spirit than she would have acknowledged to any one.

"It is I! Oh, Ora, let me in!" answered the voice of Bevvie in breathless, terrified tones.

Ora sprang up and opened the door.

Bevvie confronted her with a face as white as snow; with a form shaking from head to foot.

"What is the matter?" demanded Ora, in some excitement.

"Oh, Ora, let me come in! Shut the door! lock it! do! Oh, I can never sleep in that room, Ora! That dreadful room. I can never even go back into it again, never! Let me stay here! Oh, let me stay here! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried the distracted girl, clinging closely to her protectress, and burying her face in her bosom.

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Ora led her—almost carried her—to the large easy chair and put her into it.

"Now tell me what has frightened you," said the young lady, drawing a low chair and seating herself immediately before Bevvie's knees, and taking both her hands down from her ashen face.

"Oh, I cannot! Oh, I cannot! Oh, that dreadful, horrible room!" gasped the girl, while shudder after shudder shook her frame.

Ora held her hands and looked into her deathly pallid face; but spoke no more for some minutes, then she asked:

"Why do you call it a horrible room? What is the matter with it?"

Bevvie jerked her hands from Ora's clasp and shivered as she gasped:

"What is the matter with it? Indeed, what is the matter with it? A nameless curse is the matter with it!"

"Were you afraid to stay there alone?"

"Alone? I was not alone! Oh, Ora! I was not alone!" breathed Bevvie with a shudder, as she covered her face with her hands.

"Not alone!" gravely and anxiously inquired Ora.

"No, no, no, no! Oh, do not question me to-night. I cannot bear it!"

"Only answer me this one question. You say that you were not alone. Who was in the room besides you?"

Bevvie kept her hands over her face and shuddered

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and shuddered again and again, before she breathed forth her answer:

"An evil spirit—a devil was there bending over me!"

"Bevvie! You have been asleep, and the tales you have heard have influenced your dreams!"

"Heaven knows that I have not slept a wink. I was wide awake, waiting for you to bring me the baby."

"Then there is an intruder of the human kind. And I will find out who it is!" exclaimed Ora, starting up.

But Bevvie caught her hands and held them in such a terrified grip that Ora was forced to pause.

"Don't go, Ora! Don't stir, unless you would have me drop dead at your feet! I tell you, as I hope for salvation, that it was no form of flesh and blood that bent over my face to-night! that breathed its blasting spell over my very soul! It was a lost spirit! a lost spirit from the lowest hells!"

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CHAPTER XXI

A MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE (CONTINUED)

Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will question thee. What may this mean,
Making night hideous, and we, fools of nature,
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
—SHAKESPEARE.

BEVVIE clung to her friend, cowering under the horror that prostrated her whole frame.

Ora held her in a close embrace for several minutes, without speaking, and then at length she whispered very gently:

"Bevvie, darling, try to recover yourself. You have had the nightmare. Believe me, it was nothing worse."

"Oh, no, no; it was no nightmare! Oh, if you had experienced it yourself, you would have known that!"

"Bevvie, nightmare is so very realistic at times that it is hard to believe its illusions are not realities."

"Have you the nightmare now? Tell me that, Ora!"

"Why, no; of course I have not."

"You know that you are awake, and that I, who cling to you, am not a dream?"

"Why, certainly."

"Well, then, just as certainly do I know that I had

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no nightmare! that I was wide awake, and that the horrible presence was no dream! No, Ora! you must acknowledge this—that though a nightmare may be mistaken for a waking reality, a waking reality can never be mistaken for a nightmare! Especially when waking consciousness feels a presence so blasting in its power over soul and body! Oh, oh, Ora! Save me! Save me!" panted the girl, clinging to her protectress and shaking as with an ague fit.

"Bevvie, you are in no danger. Do try to overcome this childish terror and compose yourself."

"I will! I will try to behave myself, if you will let me stay with you to-night. I cannot go back to that room! Oh, I cannot, Ora! Do, please, let me stay here with you."

"Of course, you shall stay here with me to-night. To-morrow you will be more reasonable, and we will talk of this fright by daylight. Ghosts cannot stand the light, you know. And now, will you sit here quietly in this chair, while I take a candle and go into the next room to search it?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Don't leave me! I shall die if you do!" cried Bevvie, clinging to her friend in an accession of terror.

"Well, then, will you go in there with me?"

"Oh, no, no, no; never! I can never go in that room again! I would rather sleep out of doors than ever go into it again!" shuddered the thoroughly demented girl.

Ora heaved a deep sigh of patient resignation and yielded the point.

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Oresta, the strong and magnanimous, was—bound by her love—a slave to Bevvie, the weak and rather selfish one.

"Very well," she said, "get into bed, and I will soon follow you."

Bevvie, who was in her nightgown, climbed to the high bedstead and crept between the sheets and covered up her head.

Ora prepared herself for rest, and soon lay down beside her exacting protégé.

But neither of them slept a wink that night.

Ora lay perfectly still for fear of disturbing her nervous companion, but her brain was very busy over the events of the day.

She thought of all the stories she had heard of this haunted house, from which the tenants had fled at the sacrifice of half a year's rent; and she thought of the fright that had driven Bevvie from the long guest chamber, and she wondered, deeply, whether there could be any foundation for the tenants' superstitious weakness or for Bevvie's excessive terror.

The tenants, she reflected, might have been alarmed by the racing of rats through the hollows of the walls or by the rattling of loose doors or windows or shingles; and Bevvie, impressed by the reports she had heard, might have been the subject of a bad dream or nightmare. All this might have been, or—it might not.

On the other hand, some mischievous person might have caused all the disturbances that had driven away the Kemptons and that terrified Bevvie.

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As for any supernatural cause for the phenomena, she "pooh-poohed" it.

At any rate she resolved to go to the root of the mystery and find out whether rollicking rats and mice, or rattling shingles, or shaking windows or mischievous intruders were at the bottom of it.

She had no fears or weaknesses, and she felt so strongly tempted to go into the long room and search it that at length she very softly raised herself up with the intention of stealing away, and had just got one foot out of bed, when she felt herself seized by Bevvie, who cried out in agonized tones:

"Where are you going? Oh! please don't leave me!"

"I thought you were asleep, Bevvie."

"Oh, no, no, no! How could I sleep after such a—devilish visitation? I thought you were asleep, Ora, and I lay quite still to keep from waking you."

"Do you feel any better, Bevvie?"

"Yes; while I can feel you lying close to me! But don't leave me, Ora, please don't."

"Well, I promise you that I will not. Will that content you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Bevvie! you have spoken very vaguely of what frightened you—calling it 'a horrible presence' and 'a devilish visitation'! Do you think, now that you are lying safely by my side, and feeling so much better, you could bear to speak of this fright more plainly, and tell me exactly what it was that caused it?" inquired Ora, as she settled herself once more upon her pillow.

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"Yes," whispered the girl, as she nestled as closely as possible to her bedfellow. "Yes—for I cannot sleep a wink, and I believe it will do me good to talk, so I will tell you as well as I can."

"Well, Bevvie?"

"Well, after you left me I lay wide awake, thinking of you and baby. It was quite dark. I could not see a speck in all the room. I was just lying there and thinking that baby is so little like me, with my dark complexion and black eyes and black hair, and so much like my husband, with his fair skin, blue eyes and flaxen hair, that he is really like you also, who happen to be of the same complexion; any one who saw you and myself, and did not know us, would never suspect me being his mother; but rather you, whom he resembles so closely. Now, Ora, isn't he like you?"

"Like me? He has my pink and white skin, and my big blue eyes and reddish hair, if that is what you mean."

"'Reddish hair'! Oh, Ora, how can you say that of your lovely golden brown hair!"

"Come, you are getting better. You are beginning to pay compliments. You are overcoming your terrors, and you will soon be willing to call them the illusions of nightmare. And now tell me all about it."

"Well, Ora, I was thinking over this likeness of my baby to you, and—yes—I was actually laughing within myself at the

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that made this child so unlike his dark mother and so like his fair foster-mother that if any evil-minded person chose to think ill of either of us, the suspicion would light on you rather than on me. The humor of ' struck me, you see, Ora," said the frivolous creature.

"I am sorry, Bevvie," gravely responded Miss Orkney.

"But, listen. I only confessed this because it was the truth and the proof that I was wide awake at the time of that fearful experience of mine," said Bevvie, dropping again into the awe-stricken tone in which she had first spoken.

"I am not blaming you, dearest. Go on."

"Oh, my dear Ora! My silent laughter did not last long. Oh, listen! Even while I was chuckling I heard, or felt, or perceived some presence in the room besides myself—something moving toward me. I seemed to hear the swashing of its garments as it moved over the floor; I seemed to hear the panting of its breath as it neared me. I asked, in a low tone:

" 'Who is there?'

"But no one answered.

" ' Is it you, Ora?' I next inquired.

"Still no one answered; but the mysterious presence drew nearer and nearer to me, and as it came it seemed to breathe a blast that chilled my very blood, and congealed me to stone. I tried to cry out again, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I tried to move, but my limbs seemed paralyzed. Gradually the demon presence rose higher and higher, enveloped and sur-

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rounded me, and then slowly settled down upon me, an overwhelming and all-pervading horror of coldness and despair. I could not move, or speak, or even think. I was held in the fatal grip of Satan. I could not even pray inwardly—something diabolical lay upon me as a cloud separating my soul from heaven. Oh, Ora! It was the greatest, the deepest perdition of horror that I ever dreamed of as possible. An unutterable anguish of horror! Still, I heard and saw nothing distinctly. I only perceived this diabolical, overwhelming, deadly presence. Only felt this unspeakable agony of horror! At length, in the blind desperation with which the drowning catch at the empty air, and with an effort that almost killed me, I threw up my arms and gasped a prayer. And then the dire, suffocating burden seemed slowly to lift and disperse. The demoniacal spell was broken, and I sprang out of bed, tore open my door, and darted across the hall to seek you. There, that is all, Ora."

"Very, very like nightmare, dear Bevvie."

"Nightmare! I wish to heaven you had had the experience instead of me. Nightmare, indeed! It was a lost and ruined spirit from the lowest pit! And nothing—no, nothing—would ever induce me to sleep in that room again," exclaimed Bevvie, shuddering and clinging closely to her companion.

Ora said nothing just then, but she inwardly resolved to make the long, spare bed chamber her own sleeping room for the future.

After a while she whispered to Bevvie:

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"My child, I have one request to make of you."

"Make it, then, dear Ora, without such grave preface, for you know that your requests are commands."

"Not so; but still I ask you not to say a word about your fright before any one of the servants to-morrow."

"I promise you, Ora. I give you my word that I will not," earnestly answered the girl.

And then both sank into silence, but not into sleep; the thoughts of both were too busy with the events of the day and night.

Presently the baby in the crib was heard to move and utter a little, low, plaintive cry.

Ora arose and lifted it from its nest, and laid it in the arms of its mother. Then she returned to bed and tried to compose herself to sleep.

But in vain, for though they talked no more, they slept no more.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MORNING

Day dawned, the sun arose, and Ora left her bed, and opened the front windows to the sunshine above and the ocean of green foliage around.

"Here, take him, dear Ora. He has had enough. Lay him in the crib before the servants come. He is fast asleep," said Bevvie, from the bed.

Ora did as was requested, and then threw on a wrapper and went to call Rachel from the garret overhead,

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for there were no hanging bells in that old-fashioned house.

Rachel came quickly in response.

As Bevvie had now risen, the woman recognized her presence in Miss Orkney's room without the least surprise. She did not know that she had passed the night with Ora, but took it for granted that she had only come in this morning for a chat before dressing.

As soon as Rachel came in Ora went out, crossed the hall, and entered the long bedroom.

There was nothing in the chamber to show any cause of the preceding night's terrors. The window shutters were still closed and fastened, and the curtains were down. The room was in perfect order, except that the upper part of the bed was thrown off, leaving the print of Bevvie's head upon the pressed pillow, and the clothes that she had worn the day before lay over the back of the large easy chair by the bedside, and her slippers lay on the rug beneath it.

The room was too large, high and bare to admit of mysteries. Ora looked under the bed, but there was nothing there but the polished yellow pine floor. Then she went in turn to the large clothes closets each side of the great chimney, but she found them both locked with the keys on the outside. She opened them in turn, however, and looked in. There was nothing in either except Bevvie's summer wardrobe.

Finally she caught up Bevvie's clothes and slippers from the chair and carried them into her own room, that the girl might dress herself there.

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"Rachel," she said, "I intend to change rooms with my young friend here. You and Betsy will therefore remove all my effects from this chamber and carry them into the long spare bedroom, and bring hers here."

"Yes, ma'am; certainly, ma'am. 'Rectly after breakfast?"

"Directly after breakfast—yes."

"Oh, Ora!" began Bevvie, with an imploring look.

"Take care!" murmured Miss Orkney, and the girl was silent. So directly after breakfast the transfer began, under the immediate supervision of Ora Orkney.

Before noon all was in order in both rooms. Bevvie's belongings were arranged in Ora's chamber, filling her bureau and closets, and Ora's properties were put away in those of the long spare bedroom.

When the servants had finished their tasks, and Rachel had carried the baby down stairs and outdoors for an airing, and Ora was on her way to follow them, Bevvie suddenly came running from her new room and seized Ora by the hand, and drew her in and began to plead:

"Don't go, Ora! Don't leave me here alone to-night! Don't go and sleep in that accursed room! Don't!"

"Why, you are not afraid to occupy this chamber, Bevvie?"

"Oh, yes, I am. Yes, I am."

"But, my dear, nothing disturbed us here last night."

"Oh, but something might disturb me this night. How can I tell? If it should, and I here alone, it would kill me."

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"Then you shall not sleep alone. I will have a cot brought in for Rachel, and she shall stay with you."

"Oh, it is not for myself alone that I fear, Ora, dear Ora, but for you, also. Oh, do not sleep in that room!"

"My dear, I am not the least afraid. I am resolved to see this matter out."

"Oh! if you should experience what I did, you would never, never get over it, Ora."

"Oh, yes, I should. And, certainly, I should never let it get over me. Now, don't be childish, Bevvie. I mean to sleep in that long room this night, and not only this night, but every night henceforth and forever more, or as long as I shall live in this house, which will, I expect, be for the term of my natural life, for I like the place, and mean to make it my permanent home, and never to leave it except for travel or visiting. And I mean to make that long room my permanent bed-chamber, in spite of all the evil spirits in Hades."

"Oh, Ora! you make me shudder. I do not believe you will ever repeat the experiment, even if you come out of it alive and in your right mind."

"Nonsense, child. Don't be hysterical," said Ora, with a light laugh, as she ran out of the room and down stairs.

She went into the oak-paneled parlor and sat down to an old-fashioned escritoire and gave her mind to business; and the remaining time before dinner was spent by her in looking over the accounts that had been sent in with the groceries and provisions that had

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been ordered by Mr. Goodwin in her name before her arrival at the hall.

After dinner she was called out to see Squire Goodwin's coachman, who had driven over the pony carriage from Welcoming, with a note from his master to Miss Orkney.

Ora found the man in the hall, took the note from his hand, and sent him into the kitchen to get his dinner with the servants.

Then she returned to the parlor, sat down, and read the note, which was as follows:

WELCOMING, Thursday.

MY LITTLE LADY LOVE: I send over our pony carriage, and a safe old horse which even you cannot drive to break your neck. Do not hesitate to make us all happy by using this humble equipage as long as you may find it convenient to do so. There are a gig, a carriole, a feed wagon, and an ox cart still left for our use at Welcoming, and the girls generally prefer the ox cart. As for me, you know I always ride the white cob when I go out alone.

To-morrow is mail day at Lower Umbra, and I shall go to the post-office. If I should happen to find any letters for you, I will take them out and bring them to you.

I hope that you are comfortably settled at your ancestral home, or that you soon will be.

How did you find the ghosts? I hope they were not so uncivil as to trouble you that first night.

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With love to your little protégés, I am ever your knight and servant, THEOPHILUS GOODWIN.

"How kind of him! But he is the best fellow in the whole world!" said Ora, as she pressed the letter to her lips and sat down to answer it, by a grateful and affectionate note.

This she took into the kitchen with her, to give it into the hands of Zeno, the old coachman, whom she caught disgracing the philosopher after whom he was named, by an ardent flirtation with Betsy, the chamber-maid. She gave him the letter and started him home.

That evening, after an early tea, Ora and Bevvie sat together in the oak parlor.

Ora was reading aloud to Bevvie, who was knitting a worsted sack for the baby.

They had brought several boxes of books with them from the city, but these had not yet been unpacked; and so they had to fall back for literary entertainment upon the books on the drawing room table. But these same old books were new to them.

The selection for the evening was not, under the peculiar circumstances, a judicious one. It was the "Castle of Otranto," by Horace Walpole, an awful ghost story, which even Ora read with solemn interest, while Bevvie listened with her hair on end.

"Oh! put the book away!" said Bevvie, at length, after several hours of supernatural horrors—"I can't stand any more of it."

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"Well! I will finish this chapter and then we will go to bed," replied Ora.

And ten minutes later she closed the book, and called Old Uncle Cha'ly to come and shut up the house.

The two young women went up stairs together.

Both their rooms were lighted up. Their doors, standing opposite each other across the broad hall, were wide open. The scene looked social and cheerful.

Ora looked in at hers. There was the baby's crib standing beside the great four-post bedstead at the back of the long room, and there was Rachel in her blue dress and gay Madras turban, sitting in the large, white dimity-covered arm chair, keeping guard over the sleeping baby.

"Rachel," said Miss Orkney, "do you remember what I told you to-night?"

"That I was to put a cot in Miss Bevvie's room and sleep there to-night—yes, ma'am; I remembers. De cot is dere, ma'am, and I's ready to go soon's ebber you comes in to go to bed, so's I kin leabe de chile."

"Quite right, then, you can go now," said the young lady, as she stepped back into the hall to bid good night to her companion.

Bevvie caught her hand and clung to it until Rachel had crossed the hall and entered her room. Then she spoke in an eager whisper:

"Oh, Ora! Oh, Ora! Pray do not sleep in that demon-haunted room to-night!"

"Bevvie, I do not believe in all this nonsense! And I tell you that if I did, I would sleep in that room to-

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night, and will sleep in it always in spite of all the ghosts that ever 'walked' and all the evil spirits in Hades! That is my ultimatum!"

"But, oh, Ora! I am—I am—afraid to have baby sleep in there."

"Are you? Well, I will manage that. Go to bed now and wait to see what I will do."

Bevvie kissed her friend and followed instructions.

Half an hour later, Ora, in her nightgown, and with the sleeping child in her arms, passed from her own room into Bevvie's.

Bevvie was in bed, but wide awake and waking.

"Would you feel less afraid if I were to let you have my baby to sleep with you, my dear?" inquired Ora.

"Oh, yes, indeed, I think I should," answered Bevvie.

"Well, then, you shall have him, and I will leave the bottle with you so that you can give it to him if he should wake up and want it," replied Ora, as she laid the sleeping child in its mother's arms and slipped the nursing bottle under the pillow.

"Babies ain't no puttection 'g'in nuffin," said the unsuspicious Rachel, who was moving about the room packing up and putting away her young lady's clothes.

"I am not so sure of that," said Ora; "I think they are a protection against evil spirits, or what is precisely the same thing—evil thoughts and imaginings. My young friend here is nervous and fearful through sleeping in a strange, lonesome house; that is why you will sleep with her, and why I must lend her my baby."

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"She don't know nuffin 'bout takin' care o' no baby, young mist'ess."

"Oh, I think she does. She can take just as good care of it as I can. Don't you remember that she took care of it in Washington while I was gone to Richmond?"

"Laws! Why, young mist'ess, it was me as looked arter de baby!"

"Well, I suppose you did, mostly; and you can do the same thing now, if necessary. Meantime the baby can sleep just as well in that bed as in the crib. And now I think that is talk enough about baby. Good night, Bevvie, dear," concluded Miss Orkney, bending down and fondly kissing her protégé.

"Good night, Ora, dear. Oh, I feel as if I were sending you into the greatest danger. Oh, my dear Ora, I shall not sleep a wink this night. I shall lie awake and pray for you all night," whispered Bevvie, putting up her arms and embracing her friend.

"Oh, no! you will not lie awake," answered the young lady, with a smile. "The contact of my baby will compose you to sleep."

"Humph! If I knows anyfing 'bout babies, dey's more like to keep people 'wake 'n to put 'um to sleep!" remarked the matter-of-fact Rachel.

Ora paid no attention to her words, but left the room, and soon after heard the woman lock the door after her.

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CHAPTER XXIII

ORA'S NIGHT ADVENTURE IN THE HAUNTED ROOM

Ora entered the long bedroom, which was, as we have said, directly over the long drawing-room. It was a spacious chamber, having a lofty ceiling, and extending the whole depth of the house from front to back.

It required a great deal of light to illumine it at night; and now it had about half enough. A kerosene lamp stood on the top of the bureau between the two front windows; and the tall dressing glass behind it served as a brilliant reflector. Yet with all this its rays scarcely reached half way down the deep room, or struck the white valance at the foot of the vast four-post bedstead, whose head was against the rear wall.

But two large sperm candles stood in old silver brackets at each end of the high oaken mantel piece over the broad fireplace, half way down the room, and directly opposite the hall door.

Ora had resolved to sleep in that room, not only that night, but thenceforth, in spite of all the reputed ghosts or evil spirits that ever escaped from the pit to make "night hideous"; but she had also resolved that no trickster, if such should be about, should make her the victim of a practical joke.

So the first thing that Ora did was to shut her door and lock and bolt it securely.

The next was to look to her front window and to turn

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the screws on the heavy oaken shutters and the sashes, making them all fast.

Then she took one of the sperm candles from its bracket on the mantel piece and carefully examined the half furnished room, that had so little in it to conceal even a cat.

There were two closets—one each side the fireplace. She looked first in one, and found nothing but three long, empty shelves above, and under them a row of a dozen wooden pegs, upon which hung two black grenadine and four white muslin dresses. She lifted these one by one and shook them, to be sure that nothing was concealed there.

Then she locked that closet up and went and opened the other, which was just like it, with three long shelves above and a row of wooden pegs below, but there was nothing but two small bandboxes, containing her own hats, on the upper shelf, and her white cambric dressing gown and gossamer waterproof cloak on the pegs.

She shook these garments, and finding nothing in them, closed and locked the door.

She looked under the bed, but saw only the yellow pine boards of the floor. The bed stood with its head jammed up against the middle of the rear wall, with an open space around the sides and foot, so that there was no possibility of any one being concealed there; and though it was an old time four-poster, it had no curtains, only a deep ruffle around the edge of its high tester, or roof.

Ora searched all possible and impossible places, for

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an imaginary practical joker, just as carefully as housekeepers search at night for sneak thieves.

She looked under the baby's empty crib, but saw only the yellow pine floor; under the seat of the great easy chair, but found only the end of the Persian rug upon which it sat; up the high chimney, but saw only a square spot of night sky that seemed as far off as the North Star.

At length, being well assured that her search had been so effectual that no living creature larger than a fly could be concealed anywhere about the room, and that her fastenings were so secure that nobody could enter without breaking in with great violence and uproar, Ora put out her kerosene lamp and one of her sperm candles, leaving the other burning.

Then she said her prayers, undressed and went to bed.

Ora was a young woman perfectly sound in mind and body; she was also just now very tired and drowsy from having been kept awake all the preceding night by Bevvie's nervous terrors; so, despite ghosts and rumors of ghosts, she had no sooner laid down her head and stretched her limbs upon her own "delightful bed" than her eyelids dropped heavily and she passed into the "land of nod."

She had slept soundly several hours, when she suddenly awoke with a start.

What had wakened her?

She could not tell.

Was she awake?

She did not know!

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Great heaven! where was she, and what was this? What wild phantasmagoria of a mad midnight dream was this?

She pinched herself, rubbed her hands, and looked up the room through the two foot-posts of the bedstead.

Yes—this seemed to be the chamber in which she had lain down to sleep. There at the upper end of it stood the bureau, with the high looking glass between the two tall, white-curtained windows. There, half way down on her right hand, stood the open fireplace with its tall mantel piece and the two silver sconces with the sperm candles, the one on the end next to her still burning and dimly showing the room. There, directly across the chamber, opposite the mantel piece, was the door leading into the hall, still shut and bolted, as she could see from the light shining directly across upon it. There stood the stiff, high-backed chairs ranged formally against the walls on either side. There lay the faded Persian rugs on the yellow floor, one before the bureau and one before the fireplace.

Yes; undoubtedly this was her own room, and she herself was wide awake.

But what, then, was this weird scene that was being enacted before her? And what was this wild, grotesque, fantastic creature in the midst of it that seemed its chief actor? Now floating from side to side, now rising toward the ceiling, now whirling around with a velocity in which its outlines were lost, like the spokes of a swiftly revolving wheel! Was this a being of the earth or air? Was it a reality at all? Or was it a

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dream, a nightmare, illusion, hallucination—what? Was she, the spectator, Ora, going mad?

With the greatest effort of self-control she had ever made in her life, Ora restrained her violent inclination to shriek aloud, rush for the door, to alarm the house, and compelled herself to lie still, to watch, and to listen, come what might.

The unearthly visitant now stood still in the middle of the room long enough to enable Ora to see that it was in a grotesque human form. It seemed to be like a more than half-grown human being, with long arms, a large head covered with a great mop of black, bushy hair, a dark skin, and a pair of great, owl-like, brilliant, rolling, and flashing black and white eyes. Its garments were as strange as itself. They were of many bright-colored streamers, that, when the creature began to leap again, flew up and down in the wildest manner, adding to the diablerie of the whole action.

Never had Ora had such a struggle for self-command as when she strove to keep down all her impulses to scream or fly, and forced herself to be still and to watch the antics of this weird creature.

Leaping, dancing, floating, flying, whirling with a blinding rapidity that would have distracted the most accomplished danseuse with envy, the impish being at length reached the bureau at the upper end of the chamber, between the two white-curtained windows, and there, before the glass, it began to mop and mow, and grin and gibber in the most diabolical style.

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Presently it turned, and began to dance, leap, flout, fly, and whirl down the room toward Ora's bed.

Then the tongue of the young woman was loosened, and she spoke, faintly asking:

"In the name of Heaven, what are you, and why do you come here?"

Whisk!

It was gone!

Not the "Weel dune cutty sark" of Tam O'Shanter dispersed the witches more effectually than did the words of Ora banish the specter. In an instant it was gone—gone like a light that is extinguished!

But where?

Where does the flame of a candle go when it is blown out?

Ora sat up in the bed and gazed around. The room was in its normal condition.

No vestige of the weird visitant had been left behind. The windows and doors were still closed, as she had left them when she went to bed.

She could not compose herself to sleep again. To do so was impossible. She determined to rise and search the room, and then dress for the day.

She got out of bed, thrust her feet in slippers, went first to the nearest closet, unlocked it, took out her dressing-gown, slipped it on, and then took the lighted candle from its sconce and searched the room.

No sign of the spectral visitor was to be seen.

Then, again, Ora examined the fastenings of the doors

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and windows, and found them all secure as she had left them.

At length she unfastened and hoisted one of the front windows, threw open the close oaken shutters, and to her surprise let in a flood of morning light.

Yes; it was broad day now.

Through the green foliage of the clustering trees she saw the fiery crimson of the eastern horizon, and even while she stood inhaling the refreshing air, the first beams of the rising sun sparkled up through the interminable wilderness of trees and glinted on the window sill.

The splendid rays had dispersed all the mists and shades of night, but could not drive from Ora's mind the wonder of her strange, weird night visitor.

What was it? How did it enter her room? How did it escape thence? Whence had it come? Where had it gone? Would it return? And if so, how?

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CHAPTER XXIV

A VISITOR

If thou hast lost a friend
  By hard or hasty word,
Go, call him to thy heart again;
  Let pride no more be heard.
Remind him of those happy days,
  Too beautiful to last;
Ask if a word should cancel years
  Of truth and friendship past.
Oh, if thou'st lost a friend
  By hard or hasty word,
Go, call him to thy heart again;
  Let pride no more be heard.

—CHARLES SWAIN.

PONDERING on the inscrutable mystery of her night's adventure, and resolving not to breathe the secret to any human being, Ora turned from the open window and began to dress herself.

While she was standing before her looking-glass she heard a knock at her chamber door.

"Who is there?" she inquired.

"It's nobody but me, Miss Ory—Rachel! Hope I hasn't 'sturbed you too airly; but Miss Bevvie here—nuffin' wouldn't satisfy her, but I must come an' see if you was 'wake," said the nurse from the outside.

"Tell her yes, that I am awake and in my usual health; and that I will go in to see her as soon as I

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have finished dressing," replied Ora, fully appreciating the sort of anxiety that had caused Bevvie to send this early message, as well as the morbid dread that prevented her from coming in person.

Miss Orkney finished dressing and went at once into the room of her protégé.

Bevvie was up and dressed and so was the baby, whom Rachel held in her arms.

"Good morning, Bevvie—Rachel, put on Freddie's cloak and hat, and take him out for a little walk. The morning air will do him good," said Ora, who always made it a point to assume the sole command of the child and nurse.

"Well, now, Bevvie, what is it, dear?" inquired Ora, as soon as Rachel had carried the baby out and they were alone.

"Oh, just as if you didn't know what I want to ask! But, indeed, Ora, you don't look at all as if you had been disturbed last night! Were you? That is what I wish to know," said Bevvie, looking intently into the face of her benefactress.

"No; I was not in the least disturbed last night. I slept profoundly until morning," replied Miss Orkney, telling the literal truth, for she knew that though her window shutters were closed, the day had dawned at the hour when she awoke to find the impish specter in her room.

"Nothing—frightened—you?" inquired Bevvie, almost incredulously.

"No, I assure you!"

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"Nothing?"

"No, I say; no."

"Well, I'm sure!"

"Come, Bevvie, there's the breakfast bell! Let us go down and enjoy the realities of Aunt Nelie's delicious coffee and rice cakes, and leave shadows to night and cloud," said Ora blithely, rising to lead the way.

By Miss Orkney's direction the breakfast table was set in the oak-paneled parlor, because the morning sun shone there and the blooming rosebushes crowded into every window.

After breakfast Ora, evading Bevvie, went up to her bed chamber and locked herself in.

There, with the fatuity of a person who looks for something again and again where she has looked twenty times in vain, Ora searched every square foot of space between the four walls, and everything within them, for a possible place of concealment where her eldritch visitor might have been hidden.

But the quest left her more than ever convinced that there was no spot where any creature larger than a mosquito could have eluded her precautionary search of the night before; and left the mystery of the elfish specter more inscrutable than ever.

Yet Ora did not waver in her resolution to retain that room as her permanent sleeping apartment.

In the course of the forenoon she had the pony carriage brought to the door and took Bevvie and the baby for a drive through the woods.

There were long, winding and beautiful roads, over-

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shadowed by the high branches of magnificent trees, and here and there was a rustic bridge crossing a pretty brook.

There were innumerable birds in the green depths of the foliage, and there were countless multitudes of rabbits, squirrels, weasels, and many other forms of four-footed creatures in the thicket of undergrowth, but their presence was only to be guessed by the frequent flight of wings through the air or the scudding of little feet through the brushwood.

"You can't see a thing but trees and sky here, Ora," complained Bevvie.

"There goes a squirrel across the road," replied Miss Orkney, who was driving.

"Oh! a squirrel!" exclaimed Bevvie, contemptuously.

"Well, yonder flies a turkey buzzard. Just see how beautifully he balances himself, and how smoothly he sails, even if he is a bird of prey."

"Oh! a turkey buzzard! Who wants to see a turkey buzzard! I don't care about these things; I want to see prospects."

"Well, so you shall another day, when we will drive in another direction. You see, Bevvie, on three sides of our place, north, east and south, there are nothing but deep woods for miles and miles; but on the west side, to the rear of the house, the woods extend no farther than half a mile, and then open into a beautiful undulating country, rising gradually to the mountains. We may possibly take that drive to-morrow, Bevvie;

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but now I think we must go home, for I fear there is a storm rising. This road will take us there by an easy circuit."

Ora touched up her pony as she spoke, and started him at a faster speed.

There certainly was a storm rising, for the sky grew darker and darker, thunder rumbled in the distance, and large drops of rain fell at short intervals.

Ora drove her pony as fast as he could go, and reached Hall-in-Umbra just in time to escape the opening of "heaven's artillery," and the deluge of rain that followed.

"Take the horse quickly to the stable and rub him down," she said, as she threw the reins to the old groom, Uncle Cha'ly, and ran into the house, followed by Bevvie, who was always frightened at a thunder storm.

Dinner was ready, but no one could think of sitting down at table while the uproar of the elements continued.

Two hours later, when the storm had subsided, and the sky had cleared, and every leaf and blade of grass in field or forest was glittering with sun-struck rain drops, they dined.

Later in the afternoon there was an arrival.

Ora and Bevvie were seated in the oak-paneled parlor —Ora setting up the easel that she had just unpacked, Bevvie restringing her guitar that she had just taken from its case—when the hearty voice of Mr. Theophilus Goodwin was heard, calling cheerfully:

"Where are the young ladies, eh? Where are they?

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If they knew what I have got for them, they would not hide themselves. Oh! they are in the oak parlor, you say, Charley? All right, I can find them."

The heavy step was heard approaching, and Ora let her staggering easel fall, and threw open the door to receive her old friend.

"Ah, ha! What did I write you yesterday? That I was going to Lower Umbra, and if I should find letters in the post-office for you there, I should bring them on to you. Well, I have got a big pocket full. How do you do? How do you do?" cordially exclaimed the old gentleman, shaking hands right and left with Ora and Bevvie; and then, without waiting for any response, beginning to fumble in his coat pockets and deliver the mail.

"So very good of you, dear Mr. Goodwin! I thank you so much!" said Ora, as she received a bundle of letters, papers and magazines, and laid them on the table beside her; for though she was most anxious for news, she could not of course neglect her kind visitor to break a seal.

Bevvie pushed a large arm chair up to the table.

"Now sit down and tell us how the girls are," said Ora.

"Oh, they are jolly!" chuckled the father.

"And which of them has melted the heart of the new doctor?"

"Ho, ho! None of them or all of them! I really don't know who but a Turk or a Mormon could safely fall in love with one of my girls, they are all so much alike!

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Why, though there are five of them, and seven years and a half between the first and the last, yet no one but an intimate friend ever could see any difference even in their ages unless you stood the oldest and the youngest side by side, and even then could only guess that Cynthia might be a year or two the senior of Pink!"

"That is embarrassing!" laughed Ora—"but sit down, dear Mr. Goodwin."

"No, my dear, no; I haven't time indeed! I must go right back! The fact is I ought to be there now. I have left word at Lower Umbra for Dr. Leicester to come up to Welcoming to see me. I want him to examine the girls' lungs. And he may be there waiting for me now, for aught I know. So, my dear, if you will give me a match, I will just light my pipe and be off."

"Why, Mr. Goodwin, there is nothing at all the matter with the girls' lungs, is there?" demanded Ora, while Bevvie went to the mantel piece and brought some matches from the little safe.

"Thank you, Bevvie, my darling! No, Ora, love, there is nothing the matter with them, that I know of," answered the old gentleman, beginning to light his pipe.

"Then why do you have them examined?"

"Well—a—you see—it does no harm to have 'em sounded; and it may do good. If there is anything the matter with them, it ought to be attended to, you know."

"Well, but when there is really nothing whatever the matter with them?"

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"Why, then, it is a satisfaction to know it," said the old man, a little defiantly.

"Oh, yes, to be sure it is," assented Ora, in a tone that immediately soothed her visitor.

"Why, you see, my dear, I had Leicester to sound my lungs last week," he said, thumping himself heartily upon the chest.

"Your lungs, Mr. Goodwin! Why, I should think that you had the champion lungs of the whole country!" laughed Ora.

"So I have! So I have, my dear! And that is just what Leicester said, or words to that effect, when he had tested them. And it is a great satisfaction to me to know it upon medical authority! And that is the reason why I am going to have my girls' lungs tested this afternoon. And now I must really be going. By the way, have you had that adopted child of yours vaccinated yet?"

"No, Mr. Goodwin. I think he is too young," replied Ora.

"Well, I think you had better consult Leicester about that. I'll send him to see you if you like."

"Very well, Mr. Goodwin. Thank you so much for thinking of it."

"Well, good-day, my dears. Good-day."

"Not until we thank you also for the loan of the pony chaise, Mr. Goodwin. You give us so many things to be thankful for."

"Fiddle-de-dee, my dear! Good-by! Good-by!" ex-

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claimed the old man, seizing his hat and making his escape from further thanks.

"Ora, you never mean to let the doctor vaccinate our baby?" exclaimed Bevvie, as soon as the visitor's back was turned.

"Certainly not for some time to come, my dear; nor would the doctor himself perform the operation on so young a child."

"Well, then, what is the use of his coming here?"

"I can pay him a fee for telling me that the baby is too young to vaccinate."

"And all to please old Mr. Goodwin, who is the very greatest hypochondriac that ever I heard of in all my life."

"No, Bevvie; indeed he is not a hypochondriac."

"Well, then, what is he always bothering about the doctor for, having his lungs examined and all that?"

"I do not know, but I firmly believe that he does it to give the young doctor employment and help him into a practice. All I am afraid of, dear Bevvie, is that in his zeal he will carry things too far, and make this apparent even to its object, and so ruin all his own plans."

CHAPTER XXV

THE DESTROYED REGISTER

"Now, DEAR, let me look at these letters, which I am pining to read," said Ora, reaching for the pile on the table.

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There were several from old school friends for Bevvie. These she passed over to her companion. And there were some from classmates for herself. These she laid unopened on the table, for there was a letter with the Quebec post mark that instantly fixed her attention.

"Is that a letter from Canada?" eagerly inquired Bevvie, who was intently watching Miss Orkney.

"Yes, my dear," answered Ora, as she broke the seal and glanced rapidly over the contents. Seeing that there was nothing in it that she might not communicate to her protégé, she began to read it aloud:

QUEBEC, August 15, 18—

To MISS ORESTA ORKNEY—My Dear Daughter: I write to say, first, that I have as yet no answer from Germany received to my letters. I have now to communicate from that quarter nothing. We patience, my dear daughter, must have. And ill news have I now from another place. I grieved am you to inform that on the 15th of the month current broke out a fire the vestry of St. Lucie in; burned ashes unto the parish register, with all its records, is. My good daughter, you to warn thus I write. Care take you your attested copy of. Of the marriage the only record and evidence is it, myself except, who to Europe sails to-morrow's steamer the Sea Queen by. To Heaven you committing and all of yours, remain I,

Your father, JOHANN MULLER.

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"What in the world does the old being mean by that?" impatiently demanded Bevvie, adding: "I never could understand such tipsy English, anyway."

"It is rather dislocated, to say the least of it," admitted Ora.

"But what does he mean then? Has he heard from Fritz or not? That is what I wish to know."

"He says he has not received any answer to his letters and that he has heard nothing from Germany."

"Oh, dear, Ora! I am a deserted wife! I begin to see that but too plainly," wailed Bevvie.

"I do not believe it, dear. And I think you ought to have as much faith in your absent husband as I have in him, to say the least."

"Under all these adverse circumstances? Oh, Ora, my heart is not only sick—it is dying of hope deferred. And what is that about a fire, Ora?"

"He writes that the vestry of St. Lucie's Church took fire on the 15th of this month, and that the parish register, containing the record of your marriage, was burned; so that he warns us to be very careful of the attested copy in our possession. And, by the way, my dear Bevvie, where do you keep it?"

"Oh, where it will be perfectly safe. In my malachite cabinet with the Brahma lock, where I keep my most valuable jewels. No one can pick that lock, you know."

"No; but a thief might carry off the cabinet itself, you know. Where do you keep that?"

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"Oh, on the top of my bureau, always in sight. It looks so pretty there."

"You had better put it on the high shelf of one of the closets, and keep the door locked."

"Where it would be out of sight? No, I thank you. I like to look at it. Besides, all our own people are honest, and the dogs will keep all strangers off the place."

"That is all true, yet we cannot be too cautious," said Ora, as she then and there dropped the subject, and began to open the letters of her school friends.

They were gossiping, girlish letters, of not the slightest interest to any one but the writer and the reader; but Ora was a faithful correspondent, and as soon as she had finished the perusal she sat down to answer them all.

By the time she had completed her pleasant task Betsy came in to set the table for tea.

And after the *tête-à-tête* tea, the table was cleared off, the kerosene lamp was set upon it, and the two young women sat down to cut the leaves and look over the contents of the new magazines that had been brought with their letters.

When either would find anything particularly attractive, she would call the attention of the other.

"This is more enlivening than the 'Castle of Otranto,' " said Bevvie, at length.

"Yes; but there is a sort of fascination about that old-fashioned story," replied Ora.

"Diabolical fascination, then," added Bevvie, "and I like these much better."

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The evening passed in this way until ten o'clock, when Ora rang her hand bell and summoned Old Uncle Cha'ly to close up the house for the night.

"And I want you to take these letters to the post-office at Lower Umbra early to-morrow morning. You can ride the pony," said Miss Orkney, gathering all the letters into a little hand bag and giving the latter to the old man as she arose to leave the room.

The two young women went up stairs together, and stood, as was their custom, in the hall between their bedrooms to say good night.

"You had better come in and sleep with me, Ora," said Bevvie.

"My dear, if I were not determined to retain possession of my long bed chamber, I could select some other one. I need not crowd you."

"Well, then, you really mean to persist in occupying that room?"

"Of course I do."

"And you slept well in it also?"

"I dropped asleep as soon as I lay down, and I slept until morning—as I told you before."

"It is very odd that you did so, I think."

"Why odd? It would have been odd if I hadn't, after lying awake all the preceding night, as you know that I did, Bevvie."

"Yes; so did I like awake all the night before last, but it did not help me to sleep last night; I was wide awake until morning."

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"That was because you were morbidly anxious about me, was it not, Bevvie?"

"Well, yes, it was. I was worrying about you all night."

"But you will not worry about me to-night; you will feel that I am quite safe, and you will go to sleep, Bevvie?"

"Yes; I think I shall; for to tell you the truth, Ora, I am 'dead for sleep,' as the darkies say, now."

"Then go to bed at once," Ora advised, and she followed Bevvie into the square bedroom, where Rachel sat nodding beside the sleeping baby.

Miss Orkney herself looked to the fastenings of the windows, and as she turned to leave the room she noticed the beautiful malachite cabinet, mounted in gold, standing on the dressing bureau.

"I think I would like to look at that marriage certificate of yours, to be sure that it is safe, Bevvie," she said.

The younger woman untied a red velvet ribbon from her neck, and gave Ora the silver key that hung upon it.

Miss Orkney unlocked the cabinet and found the two invaluable papers—the certificate of Bevvie's marriage and that of her child's baptism—quite safe. She carefully replaced them, locked the cabinet, and gave Bevvie the key, saying:

"Be very careful of these papers, Bevvie."

"I shall be; but I don't think you need be afraid, for the parish register is burnt, and these copies might be lost, still there is the priest who married us, and the stu-

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dent who witnessed the ceremony," said the careless one.

"The priest is an aged servant of the Lord, ripe for heaven. The student has already passed away. And you have in your own hands nothing but these papers to prove the legality of your marriage and the legitimacy of your child," said Miss Orkney, very impressively.

"Oh, dear me, Ora! You are enough to make my hair stand on end! But don't you be uneasy! I will take the greatest care of the papers. See! I keep them always in that cabinet, and the key of the cabinet around my neck."

"Very well, then, Bevvie! Now, good night. Lock and bolt the door after me and let me hear you do it before I cross the hall," said Miss Orkney, as she kissed her protégé and left the room.

She heard Bevvie lock and bolt the door, and then she crossed the hall and entered her own chamber.

She searched the place as thoroughly and fastened it up as securely as she had done on the preceding night, and then feeling assured that no living creature except herself was in the room, or could possibly get into it without first arousing herself, she went to bed and to sleep.

Sleep lasted until daylight and then left her. She awoke to find her room in its normal condition; no eldritch creature was visible. She arose and dressed and went down into the parlor.

Bevvie had not yet appeared; she was probably making up for two nights' vigilance.

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Rachel came down with the baby dressed for his morning walk.

"Where is your young mistress?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Sleeping like a top, ma'am! I took the baby and its clothes into one o' the empty rooms to wash and dress it, so as not to wake Miss Bevvie," replied the woman.

"Quite right. Let her sleep," replied Ora, as she sat down to continue reading an article in one of the magazines that she had commenced on the evening before.

She read on for an hour before Bevvie came down, looking perfectly refreshed and very pretty in her clean, bright, percale print wrapper.

"Ah, good morning, dear! You have had a fine sleep!" said Ora, rising and laying aside her magazine.

"Oh, yes! I feel like a new creature this morning. Where is the baby?"

"Rachel has taken him out to walk. Come, we will have breakfast now," said Miss Orkney, as she arose and rang her hand bell.

Betsy brought in the breakfast tray, and the two young women sat down to the table.

"Yes," said Bevvie, as she received a cup of coffee from the hands of her friend—"yes; I slept so soundly that I did not hear Rachel dressing the baby, although she commonly makes noise enough, and he, too, for that matter."

"Oh, the nurse took the child to another room, to dress him, for fear of waking you," Ora explained.

"She did! well, that accounts for my not hearing the

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uproar of baby's toilet! But, then, I did not even hear you, Ora!" added Bevvie, with a wistful look at her *vis-à-vis*.

"Oh, I, too, moved softly," replied the young lady.

"Humph!" muttered Bevvie, and from that time she furtively watched Ora's face, with some meaning in her own that Miss Orkney failed to perceive.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

All through the forenoon Bevvie continued to watch Ora furtively.

At length, while they were sitting together under the shade of an acacia tree in front of the house—Ora reading aloud from the inexhaustible magazines, Bevvie working at her interminable embroidery—the latter suddenly looked up, laughed, and said:

"Well, Ora, if you have kept it up long enough, perhaps you will tell me!"

"'Tell you?' Tell you what, Bevvie?"

"The secret."

"What secret, child?"

"'What secret,' indeed! Oh, what a good actress you are, Ora! You know what secret well enough!"

"Indeed I do not, Bevvie. What in the world are you talking about?" inquired Miss Orkney, in such genuine

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surprise and perplexity that her companion could no longer accuse her of being an actress.

"Why, of course I mean the hiding-place of my pretty malachite casket," she said.

"Your malachite casket!" echoed Miss Orkney, more perplexed than ever.

"Yes; my malachite casket with those certificates that you were so much afraid of my losing! Come, now, Ora!"

"Your casket!" exclaimed Miss Orkney. "Why, what about it?"

"Oh, now, Ora! Don't keep this up any longer. But if you will only give me my lovely casket, you may take out my certificates and keep them yourself if you think that I cannot be trusted with them. For I know that is the reason why you have locked up my casket."

"Bevvie! What do you mean? I have not got your casket."

"No; not in your hands at this moment, but in your possession!"

"Indeed I have not! Why on earth should you think that I have your casket in my possession?"

"Oh, I do not mean to say, Ora, that you have not a right to have it if you think best. You are still my guardian. And if you think you can keep it and its contents more securely than I can, of course you are right to do so. But I only wish to say that you may take the documents out and keep them yourself, if you will only let me have the lovely casket. I want it to stand on my bureau. It is so lovely there!"

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"But, my dear Bevvie, can you not believe me when I tell you that I have not got your casket?"

"Not got my casket!" exclaimed Bevvie, turning paler than her wont.

"No, indeed; I have not! Why do you ask me? I hope—I hope it is not missing!" said Ora, sharing the agitation of her protégé.

"Well, it is, then! I thought—after our talk last night, and when I missed it from the top of the bureau this morning—that you had come in and locked it up somewhere for safe keeping."

"No, indeed! I have not seen it since I left it in your possession last night. Perhaps Rachel or Betsy, in arranging your room this morning, may have set it aside somewhere. Did you inquire of them?"

"No; I never thought of doing so, my mind was so settled in the conviction that you had put it away for safe keeping."

"I have not touched it since I left it on your bureau, when I bade you good night. Have you thoroughly searched your room?"

"No; I tell you that when I missed it from its place I thought you had taken it to put it away in some safe place, and I never searched for it; though if it had been in the room, I should have seen it without searching. It is too beautiful and brilliant an object to escape notice."

"Then come and let us overhaul everything in the room and the house, for one of the servants may have moved it."

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"Oh, Ora, I hope and trust it is not lost!"

"Why, no, I trust not! How should it be, indeed! Your room was locked up securely last night; no stranger could have got in, and the household here is honest. Come—I expect it will be found safe, sitting somewhere covered over with a napkin or something," replied Miss Orkney, as she led the way into the house.

They went up together into Ora's room and searched it thoroughly, opening every closet, drawer, box, and trunk: but they searched in vain. No vestige of the missing casket could be found.

While they were looking at each other in dismay, Rachel entered, with the baby fast asleep in her arms. She carefully laid him in the crib, and was about to leave the room, when Miss Orkney said:

"Stop, Rachel; I wish to speak to you."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You know the malachite casket that stood upon the bureau here?"

"You mean the green and goold box, honey?"

"Yes; that is the one I mean. Do you know what has become of it?"

"I!" exclaimed the woman, quick to take alarm at the idea of being suspected of making away with any missing property.

"Yes; I ask you if you know where it is?"

"Laws, no, honey! Can't yer find it nowhere?"

"Not in this room. We hoped that you might have put it away somewhere."

"Ain't tetched it, honey!"

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"Do you remember when you saw it last?"

"Le' see now. When did I see that green an' goold box last? Oh, I know! W'y, las' night, honey, w'en I was a noddin' dere by de baby's crib, I seen you an' Miss Bevvie a-lookin' at it, an' one on yez put it up on de bureau; but I was so dead sleepy I didn't notice w'ich it was did it. An' dat's de las' I 'members seein' of de green an' goold box."

"You were the first one awake in the room, were you not?"

"Yes, Miss Ory. Yes, honey; I was de fus one up."

"And did you notice whether the casket was on the table, then?"

"No, honey, I didn't notice. 'Twas dark in the room, 'caze de night light had gone out an' de windies wan't open, an' Miss Bevvie so soun' asleep dat I jes' tuk de baby up out'n de crib an' tuk it off inter anoder room to dress, fo' fear o' waking her. Look yer, honey, wey's de Bible? Oh, I see it! Dis is de Bible, isn't it, honey?" inquired Rachel, taking up a small volume bound in Russia leather, with brass clasps, from the top of the bureau.

"Yes; that is the Bible," replied Miss Orkney, at a loss to know what the woman meant.

"Well, honey, if so be as you an' Miss Bevvie 'spicions me of stealin' de green an' goold box, I want to take my oaf, an' kiss de 'vine book on it, as I nebber done it!" said the woman, reverently lifting the sacred volume.

"Rachel! No! How could you think we could do

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you such a wrong?" exclaimed Miss Orkney, blushing crimson with sympathetic humiliation.

"I dunno, honey! I dunno! I shouldn't be de fus' as was wrongfully s'pected, if yer did. But 'deed, honey, I'd feel much easier in my mind if yer would s'arch my boxes."

"I never would subject you to such an indignity, Rachel; so say no more about that. But you can help us to search the house, if you please."

"Dat I will, Miss Ory; an' I pray de 'Vine Marster as yer may find it," replied the woman. "Some one might acome into de room an' tuk it out w'ile Miss Bevvie was asleep an' I was away wid de baby, dough," she added.

The search was commenced and carried all through the house; every nook and cranny in every room in the house, from attic to cellar, was carefully overhauled, but without the effect of discovering the missing casket.

Then every servant about the premises was examined and cross-examined, without the result of a single clew to the loss of the treasure.

At last Ora offered a hundred dollars reward for its recovery, and told the servants to tell everybody else.

When it was dark the two young women, weary with their fruitless work, sat down to a belated tea. They were alone, and Bevvie was the first to break the silence.

"Oh, Ora! what could have become of my casket?" she said.

"I have asked myself that question at least a hundred

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times since noon without being able to answer it," replied Miss Orkney, with a deep sigh.

"And to think my lovely set of pearls and rubies have gone with it!" whimpered Bevvie.

"Oh, I do not care at all about your trinkets. They can be replaced. I am troubled by the loss of your marriage and baby's baptism certificates."

"Well, I know that is awkward, after your going so far to get them, and now that the parish register is burned and the one witness dead, too; but, then, Father Muller is living, and he knows he performed the marriage ceremony, and surely that is proof enough, even if Fritz should never be heard of again," said careless Bevvie.

"I hope it may be," gravely replied Ora.

After tea, instead of settling to their night's reading and embroidering, the two young women recommenced their vain search, until, thoroughly worn out with fatigue, they prepared to go to bed.

Ora, as was now her custom, went with Bevvie to the latter's bedroom. There they found Rachel, as before, sitting and nodding, by the sleeping baby's crib.

Being still disturbed in her mind about the missing casket, the woman dozed but lightly, and woke up quickly on the entrance of the two young ladies.

"Yer ain't seen nuffin of it yet, is yer, honey?" she inquired of Miss Orkney.

"No, Rachel; I am sorry to say that I have not," replied Ora, dropping into the nearest chair.

"No, honey; nor you won't see nuffin ob it it needer

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till yer sends for a cons'ble and takes de 'fair up wid a strong hand."

"What do you mean by that, Rachel?"

"Yer does me de grace to say as yer doan 'spicion me ob takin' de green an' goold box, honey?"

"No, Rachel; I do not suspect you. Why, I could swear for you, Rachel."

"Thanky, honey! An' similar, I could sw'ar for Betsy! So none ob us two city colored people took that dere walable box! Now, den, wot is de consekinse, honey? W'y, the consekinse is dat some ob dese yere low-life country niggers is got it. Dem's de t'ieves! 'Deed it's de trufe! So yer had better take my adwise, honey, an' send for a cons'able an' scare um good an' make um gib it up."

"Rachel, I am sure that none of my people have meddled with that casket! I am sure of it, mind!" earnestly exclaimed Ora.

"I know me an' Betsy haven't! I know dat! But same time I know dese yere low-life country niggers hab done took it! 'Deed it's de trufe."

"No, no; you mustn't falsely accuse them," replied Ora, as she arose with a sigh, kissed Bevvie good night, and left the room.

When Ora reached her own chamber, she found her housekeeper, Nelie, waiting to speak to her.

"You here, Nelie! Well, then, don't stand! Sit down and tell me what you want," said Miss Orkney, throwing herself down on the outside of her bed from sheer fatigue.

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"Has yer come across dat dere casket yet, honey?" inquired the woman.

"No, indeed, auntie; I wish I had!"

"'Deed, honey, I'se 'feared yer won't, neider, ef yer don't carry on wid a high hand!"

"How with a high hand, Nelie? What can I do?"

"Now, look yere, honey! I know berry well as yer'd nebber do us sich an injustice as to fink as any ob us, 'spectable, 'sponsible ole famberly servants would demean ourselbes by takin' ob nuffin wot didn't belong to us!"

"Of course not, Aunt Nelie! Of course not!" emphatically answered Miss Orkney.

"I knowed dat, honey! I knowed dat! I was only 'mindin' yer ob it! Well, den, as it is gone, and as we didn't take it, an' as it couldn't go 'dout han's, an' as dere ain't been no strangers 'bout de place since yer saw it, doan yer see for yerse'f how it must a goed?" inquired Nelie, in a subdued tone and with a very significant look.

"No, indeed; I do not," replied Miss Orkney.

"Don't yer, dough, honey?"

"No, really."

"Yer don't?"

"No; I say, no! Do you?"

"Yes, honey, I jes' does! An' dat's wot I done come yere to speak my mine 'bout."

"Tell me, then!" said Miss Orkney, eagerly.

"Dem low-life city niggers, honey," whispered the woman, nodding her turbaned head.

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"Do you mean Rachel and Betsy?" inquired Miss Orkney, in surprise.

"Yes, honey! Dem low-life city niggers! Dem's de t'ieves! An' de sooner yer habs dem up 'fore a magister an' makes dem gib up de stolen probity, de sooner yer'll get de caskit. 'Deed it's de trufe."

Ora lay back over her pillow and burst into one of her uncontrollable peals of laughter.

Nelie threw up her chin and looked injured and offended.

Ora's fit of mirth exhausted itself and then she spoke. She did not mention what was then uppermost in her mind—that the "city niggers" had half an hour before laid the theft at the door of the "'spectable, 'sponsible, ole famberly servants." She only said:

"Oh, Nelie, no! They never took the casket! They are as honest as I am, or—as you are. I could not possibly say more for them than that."

"Well, honey, I know you finks so, else you wouldn't say it. But as for me, I b'lieve dem dar low-life city niggers stole dat casket. 'Deed it's de trufe! Kin I do anyfing for yer 'fore I goes, honey?"

"No, I thank you, Nelie."

"Well, den, good-night, honey."

"Good-night, Nelie."

The woman left the room.

Ora arose and, as on the preceding nights, searched and secured her chamber and then undressed and went to bed.

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In the morning Ora was able to report another night of undisturbed repose.

And this was well, for that morning heralded another day of persevering search for the lost casket. And evening found the searchers disappointed and weary.

Days passed and brought no solution of the mystery.

The old servants and the new looked askance at each other, each set really suspecting the other of the theft of the casket. Each would have openly accused the other had not Ora, with much address, kept the peace between them.

The loss of the casket was serious enough in itself; but before the end of the week news arrived which changed the loss into an almost fatal calamity.

On the next succeeding mail day Ora, taking Bevvie for her companion, entered her pony carriage and drove to Lower Umbra to get her letters and papers from the post-office.

There were but two letters for her, from school friends; and there were none for Bevvie.

Ora opened and glanced through her letters, and then put them aside with the unopened papers to be read at home, while she, for the present, gave herself up to the enjoyment of the drive, the beautiful scenery of hill and valley, wood and water.

They reached home early in the afternoon, changed their dresses, took tea, and when the table was cleared and the evening lamp lighted, they sat down to the perusal of the papers, each with a sheet in her hand,

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and each frequently calling the attention of the other to some item of unusual interest.

At length Bevvie called out in an agitated, inarticulate voice.

Ora looked up from her paper inquiringly.

"Oh, Ora! Oh! read that!—read that!" at length exclaimed Bevvie, as, with a shaking hand, she passed her paper to her companion, pointing to a paragraph at the head of a column.

Ora took the journal and read—with what dismay may be readily imagined—the following obituary notice:

The Quebec *Signal* records the sudden death, from heart disease, of the venerable Father Johann Muller, for many years a zealous missionary among the Canadian Indians, but of late years, on account of his infirmities, assistant curé of St. Lucie's Church in the village of that name. The reverend father was to have sailed the next day, by the Sea Queen, on a long-deferred visit to his native land, where he has brothers and sisters still living.

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CHAPTER XXVII

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

Did we think of the light and sunshine,
Of the blessings left us still,
When we sit and ponder darkly,
Darkly, blindly o'er life's ill,
How we should dispel the shadows
Of a still and deep despair,
And the weight of anguish lessen
Which every heart must bear.

—PHŒBE CAREY.

"FATHER MULLER gone! Dead of heart disease! Oh, Ora, how awfully sudden! Oh, I am so sorry! He was such a good old man!" said Bevvie, forgetful for the moment of the disastrous bearing of this death upon her own destiny.

"He was a saint prepared for heaven. He 'rests from his labors, and his works do follow him.' There is no cause to sorrow for him; but, my poor dear, this is a serious misfortune to you," sighed Miss Orkney.

"Oh, isn't it, though! Oh, Ora! what is to be done? Was ever anything so unlucky, so fatal? The parish register in which my secret marriage was recorded has been burned; the attested copy lost, stolen or destroyed! the only witness gone, and the officiating priest dead! Oh, Ora! what is to be done now?" wildly demanded the agitated girl.

"The casket with the documents—if they are still in

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existence—must be recovered at all cost! I will offer a thousand dollars for the restoration of the casket and its contents, and promise that no questions shall be asked as to its taking off," gravely replied Miss Orkney.

"Oh, Ora! I am an everlasting subject of trouble and expense to you!" cried Bevvie, almost in tears.

"I assumed all that responsibility, my dear, when I adopted you seventeen years ago."

"When you were an irresponsible child of five years, and I an unknown babe of five weeks!"

"Nevertheless, my dear, I think that even then I had some intuitive knowledge of the gravity of the duty I was assuming. Or, if I had not, my dear father and the good nuns soon impressed my mind with the truth. Let this pass, Bevvie. I love you. This makes all easy. Now I must write out my advertisement offering a reward for the lost casket, and get posters printed and stuck up all along the turnpike roads and in every public place; for the casket—if it is still in existence—must be in this neighborhood somewhere."

"Why do you say, 'if it is still in existence,' Ora? Surely no one could destroy such a pretty thing."

"Unless to prevent detection through its discovery. The casket was probably stolen for its supposed contents of money, not for itself."

"Oh! I hope no one has destroyed the pretty casket! I hope, oh! I hope it will be found safe!" exclaimed the frivolous Bevvie.

"It is more to the purpose that the papers it contains be found safe," said Miss Orkney, with some severity,

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for there were moments when Bevvie's frivolity tried her patience.

"Oh, yes, I know! I hope we may recover both—casket and contents! There, I will not interrupt you again, Ora. Go on and write out your advertisement," said Bevvie, with the air of conferring a favor upon Miss Orkney for that young lady's own sake.

Ora wrote out the tempting offer of a thousand dollars paid, and no questions asked, on the restoration of the green and gold casket; or five hundred dollars for information that should lead to its recovery—with its contents intact.

The next day this poster was printed at the office of the *Lower Umbra Weekly,* and stuck up at every cross-roads and on every milestone, barn and fence where it would be likely to be seen; and on Saturday afternoon it appeared in the advertising columns of the *Weekly.*

But the tempting reward brought no response.

The poor white people of the vicinity and the negroes who, though they could not read, soon found out the meaning of the posters, all lost their time, appetite and sleep through searching for that lost casket, brooding over that large reward, and studying how, by the help of angel, demon or fortune teller, they might manage to find the lost property, earn the thousand dollars, and so enrich themselves for life.

All sorts of plans were on foot. There were a few petty thieves—hen-roost robbers and sheep stealers—in the neighborhood, and these were every one visited in turn by desperate seekers, who insulted them by sly

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proposals to act as go-betweens and "gib up dat dere box wot yer know yer stole" to the rightful owner on condition of receiving a portion of the reward.

But apparently the petty thieves knew no more of the lost property than did their accusers.

Miss Orkney by her act had done much more harm than she had ever contemplated. Farm work was utterly neglected. Who would plow, sow or reap at fifty cents a day, when a thousand dollars might be picked up any hour by the discovery of that casket?

"My dear child," complained old Mr. Goodwin, while making a morning call at Hall-in-Umbra, "you have demoralized the laboring classes of the whole county. The niggers especially think of nothing by day and dream of nothing by night but finding that casket and winning that thousand dollars."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Goodwin, but what can I do?" inquired Ora.

"Nothing, now. The mischief is done and cannot be undone. But, my dear, what was in that casket to justify your offering so large a reward for its recovery?"

"There were things of inestimable value," replied Ora.

"Money? Jewels? Papers?"

"All three; but the papers are of the greatest importance. Casket, money and jewels might go in welcome, if the papers could only be restored," sighed Ora.

"Then, my dear, why did you not say so at once? If you had, you would probably have received the casket

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within twenty-four hours after advertising for it. But you required the casket with its contents intact."

"But I meant the papers only."

"Then why did you not put it so? Oh, you women! You should always consult some honest man on business matters."

"Like you, Mr. Goodwin."

"Yes, like me, if you choose to put it so. Now listen, my dear. Your very liberal offer has not succeeded in bringing the casket, with its contents intact, to light. Why? Because the casket may have been destroyed in the attempt to force it open, and the money spent, and jewels sold and distributed, so that the conditions of the reward offered could not be fulfilled. But as the papers are of no use to any but the owner, they may be still safe. Now, my dear, advertise your reward for the restoration of the papers alone. Say that the finder of the lost property may keep the casket, the money and the jewels, and receive the offered reward, with no questions asked, on condition of restoring the papers. And you may depend you will get them in a few days."

"Oh, I see. Thank you so much, Mr. Goodwin. I will write out the new advertisement at once. And perhaps, as you are going back soon, you would be so very kind as to take it for me to the office of the *Weekly* and get it set up," said Ora, unhesitatingly pressing the benevolent old squire into her service, as every one else did into theirs.

"Of course I will, Ora, my dear. Go at once and do it, and I will sit here and smoke while waiting," assented

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Mr. Goodwin, dropping into an arm chair on the piazza, and drawing a stumpy clay pipe from his pocket and beginning to fill it with tobacco.

"Have you a match, Mr. Goodwin?"

"No, my dear; you may send me one."

Ora went and brought it, and then hurried into the house to set about her task.

The squire sat under his broad-brimmed hat, and tranquilly raised a cloud of stupefying smoke between himself and the September sunshine.

In about fifteen minutes Ora returned with a folded paper, which she placed in the hands of the obliging squire.

"Have you had that child vaccinated yet?" inquired Mr. Goodwin, as he took his pipe from his mouth and slowly arose to his feet.

"No, dear 'Marse Tomfilius,' I have not," replied Ora, with a deprecating smile. "Dr. Leicester admitted, when you sent him here, that the child was yet too young to risk it."

"Well, but you did not let the young fellow come all the way from Lower Umbra to the hall and lose half a day for nothing, I hope, my dear?"

"Of course I did not, 'Ole Marse.' I am quite vexed with you for supposing that my father's daughter could do such a thing. Bah! I paid him a very large fee, though I had a good deal of trouble to make him take it."

"I beg your pardon, my dear. Young people are so thoughtless that—that—you might have forgotten to

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offer a fee, which the young fellow would never have asked for. Well, you'll let him vaccinate the baby?"

"No I won't. He shan't fool with my baby at all. You may send him here as often as you like to look at the family's tongues, and sound their chests, and extract their teeth, and he may do it, but he shan't fool with the baby," said Ora, laughing.

"My dear, you are jesting at the expense of one of the most accomplished young physicians in the world—one who is far too good for this narrow sphere of action."

"Oh, I dare say. All the same, he shall try no experiments 'in the interests of science' on my baby."

The squire went toward his old white cob, that was tethered to one of the trees and quietly cropping the grass on the lawn.

Ora saw that the kind old man was hurt, and she ran out toward him, and held out her hand, saying:

"Don't mind my nonsense. I trust your young friend quite as much as you do, dear Mr. Goodwin. And he shall do just as he thinks best, because I am sure he knows best."

The squire turned toward her with a smile.

"I fear I am getting to be an irritable old scamp, Ora. I do indeed. It must be these early autumn fogs. Malaria down there in the Umbra."

"You irritable? Why, you know very well that you are a dear old angel without wings," exclaimed Ora.

And they parted the very best of friends.

The next day the new posters, printed in larger letters

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and on a different colored paper to attract fresh attention, were stuck up everywhere directly over the old ones.

For a day or two nothing came of them. And then "the deluge"!

The last state of that neighborhood was worse than the first. The reward offered was now for the papers, only for the papers, and to the dense negro mind papers were papers, and much more easily obtained than caskets.

So it happened that on the morning of the third day after the appearance of the new posters, while Ora and Bevvie were seated at the breakfast table, a message was brought in by Uncle Cha'ly to the effect that Uriah, one of Mr. Goodwin's colored servants, wanted to speak to Miss Orkney "lonesome by herself wid nobody else to hear."

"Take him into the front porch; I will see him there," said Ora. And she left her breakfast unfinished and went out to meet the early visitor.

He was a tall, gaunt, very black old negro man, with snow-white hair and beard. He was dressed in homespun cloth, and he held in his hand a large packet of very old and browny-white letters.

"Your sarvunt, young mist'ess. I done fotch back dem papers wot yer lost, and would tank yer for dem fousand dollars wot yer gwine to gimmy for um," said the old negro, as he arose with difficulty from the bench on which he had been resting and handed the bundle of old letters to Miss Orkney.

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"Why, what are these, Uncle Uriah?" inquired the young lady, as she turned about the parcel in her hands.

"Dem dere papers wot yer offered a 'ward for, young mist'ess, w'ich yer'l please let me have dat money now, honey, as I fetched yer de papers," replied the old man, impatiently fingering the dilapidated hat that he held ready to cover his head.

"But these are not my papers, Uncle Uriah. These are some one's old letters. I know nothing about them," said Miss Orkney, as, without untying the faded pink ribbon that bound them, she turned over the ends of the faded letters idly.

"Oh, now, honey," began the old man, in a tone of sorrowful remonstrance, "doan yer go back o' yer own word! Doan yer grine de faces ob de po', 'specially ob de po' ole man a standin' befo' yer, in de white hair ole ages ob his pilgrimidge. Put away dem precious docky-ments and gimmy de fousand dollars wot yer promised."

"But these are not the papers I want. I suspect, now that I have looked at them, that they are some of your master's old letters. You had better take them back to him. Where did you get them?"

"Dere now, young mist'ess. T'ought yer promised as yer wouldn't ax no questions, an' here yer is a-axing questions," said Uriah, in an aggrieved tone.

"I should have asked no questions, but I should have paid down a thousand dollars if all the right papers had been brought me," replied Miss Orkney.

"Oh, laws! See dat now!" cried the old man, with a shudder of feeling at the thought of this tremendous,

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inconceivable sum of money which he might have won, but somehow or other could not. Why on earth would not one parcel of written papers do as well as another? He could not see much difference in any of them, and these must be worth money, for his master had always kept them so carefully in the little upper drawer of his secretary.

"I am sorry for your disappointment, Uriah—very sorry. I am disappointed myself. I wish these were the papers I want. But they are not, and so you had better put them back where you got them, wherever that might have been."

"Oh, now, Miss Ory," remonstrated the old man, putting his hands behind him and declining to receive the packet, "doan yer change your mind 'bout gibbing de 'ward now yer got de papers! Doan, honey, doan go back on yer own word. Doan 'press de po'. Yer promise' to pay fo' de papers an' ax no questions. An' here yer's been 'fusin' to pay, and axin' a lot. Put de wallable papers 'way, honey, and pay honest like a lady."

"But, you old dolt!" exclaimed Ora, losing her patience, "I tell you that these are not my papers; they are somebody else's letters! And you must go and put them where you got them from."

And she dexterously dropped the parcel into his hat and turned to re-enter the house.

"Hold on, young mist'ess! My goodness libe! Doan be so ha'sh! Listen to me, young mist'ess! Please listen to me!"

Ora turned back on this appeal.

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"'Deed, laws knows, young mist'ess, dese is de berry papers you wants! 'Ca'se I got um f'om a green an' goole party!—leastways, I mean I got um fum a party as—as—as foun' dat dere green an' goole casket, jes as you've 'scribed it in de 'wertismint, wid dese yere same said papers inside ob it! 'Deed it's de trufe, mist'ess!"

Ora looked at the poor old wretch from head to foot, more in pity than in reproach, and then answered:

"Take these papers and put them where you got them from. Then bring me the papers that I want, and I will reward you for them."

And with these words she re-entered the house.

The old negro dropped upon the bench, and holding his hat on his knees, gazed sorrowfully down on the packet of letters in its crown.

"Well, well, well," he mournfully soliloquized. "To come so nigh gettin' ob a fousand dollars an' den not to get it! Well, laws, de narrow 'scapes dere is in dis worl', to be sure!"

And then, with a sigh, he slowly arose and went away.

Uriah's visit was but the beginning of these sorts of troubles. He had scarcely cleared the plantation when another negro came with another parcel of old papers, that, upon examination, proved to be a bundle of receipts.

In the course of that day, and of many succeeding ones, negroes came from all quarters, bringing all sorts of documents, in hope of winning the reward.

And the worst of it was that Miss Orkney had to see them all and examine their offerings, upon the mere

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chance that some among these might prove to be the missing certificates.

How they must have rummaged their masters' and mistresses' writing desks and secretaries! And what a miscellaneous lot of writings was submitted to the young lady's scrutiny—from old fly-stained and moldy bills, smelling strongly of stale tobacco smoke, to dainty little notes fragrant of rose or violet. All these were forthcoming from their secret retreats, but no certificates.

And so days and weeks passed, until at length all hope of recovering the lost documents was given up.

How the negroes grumbled over their disappointment.

"A fousand dollars gwine a beggin' all ober de neighborhood! So easy to yern, too, an' I not to yern it!"

So each man and woman growled in secret to himself or to herself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BOUQUET OF BEAUTIES

EARLY in the morning of a lovely day in the latter part of September, the Goodwin girls came to pay their promised visit to Hall-in-Umbra.

All five came to spend the whole day. The youngest two, Laurel and Myrtle, were to stay over Sunday.

"For you see, my dear," said Jessamine, "we cannot all leave dear papa at once. Laure and Myrt being little ones, must be indulged with the first visit, and

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Cynth and Pink, and myself, will come to stay on some future occasion."

"I wish you could all stay now! But is not your dear papa coming to-day?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Oh, yes! You may be sure, he is safe enough to come! He enjoys company as if he were a boy! But he has ridden around by Lower Umbra to bring Doctor Leicester here with him—and without your leave, too! I think the dear old darling is taking a very great liberty with you, Ora," said Miss Jessamine.

"Not at all!" emphatically replied the young hostess. "I hope and trust that your dear father will always feel as free to do as he pleases, with this house and in this house, as if he were my father also."

"Well! I think he will oblige you in that particular, Ora," laughed Jessamine.

"And do not I always ask services of him as freely, just as freely as if I were his daughter?" questioned Miss Orkney.

"Well! who has a better right? But to be sure, for that matter, everybody orders father around!" added Jessamine.

"And no one more than Jess herself!" put in the youngest Miss Goodwin.

"Tell me," said Hyacinth—"have you had any news of the lost casket?"

"None in the world, my dear, not the slightest. In that affair I have lost hope as well as the casket. The negroes have ceased bringing me old passbooks and valentines in expectation of getting the reward for the

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lost documents; and even the house servants have grown tired of recriminations, and no longer call each other ill names or accuse each other of the theft," sighed Ora.

"But you may recover it yet! I have often noticed that while people are most frequently disappointed in what they hope for, they quite as frequently are astonished by obtaining what they had despaired of," suggested Laurel.

"Yes," assented Ora. "Shakespeare expresses the same experience:

> Oft expectation fails; and most oft there
> Where most it promises; and oft it hits
> Where hope is coldest and despair most sits."

"Now I wonder if there has been anything said by anybody, on any subject, since Shakespeare lived and died, that had not been previously said by Shakespeare? I declare to you all, that I thought that piece of wisdom was original with me! The fruit of my own especial tree of knowledge! And here I have Shakespeare thrown in my teeth!" exclaimed Hyacinth, in real or in affected vexation.

"Don't quarrel now, Cynth! Tell me, Ora! Is this house really haunted? Have you seen or heard anything yourself?" inquired Myrtle, wistfully.

Ora paused for reflection before she replied; for she scarcely knew how to reply. At length she said, evasively:

"Well, my dears, for the first two nights that we slept

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in this house we were—both Bevvie and myself—a little nervous and wakeful, but since then, I assure you, we have slept well and undisturbed by fears!"

"And never seen or heard anything to alarm you since?" questioned Laurel.

"No; never since," replied Ora.

But there was a slight difference of meaning between the question and the answer. Laurel meant, "since you came into the house;" Ora meant, "since the first two nights of which I spoke."

But they were both satisfied. And then the girls began to talk of other matters.

And—as this conversation had taken place in the long bedroom, where the five visitors were taking off their bonnets, washing their faces and brushing their hair after their long drive, and as these operations were now finished, they all went down into the long drawing room below, which, at this season, was the pleasantest apartment in the house.

Here they found Bevvie, trying the new piano that had been sent down from Richmond only two days before.

She arose to greet all the visitors, and then resumed her seat.

"Shut up the instrument, Bevvie, dear! We had all rather hear the sound of our own sweet voices than any other music," said Ora, who perfectly understood the tastes of her visitors.

"Do you know, dear, the reason why I think papa is going to bring the young doctor here this evening?"

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whispered Jessamine to Ora, as they stood apart from the rest of the company.

"No, not particularly. What is it?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"I'll tell you! I think he wants to make a match between him and Bevvie."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Ora—"Bevvie couldn't—that is, Bevvie wouldn't—— What nonsense! I don't believe the young doctor ever thought of such a thing!"

"I don't know, I am sure. It is hard telling what goes on in other people's brains!" retorted Jessamine.

"Here come the subjects of our conversation now!" said Ora, looking through the front window upon the woodlawn, across which two horsemen were riding at a leisurely pace.

In a few moments they rode up to the horseblock, dismounted, passed their reins to old Cha'ly, who came running up to receive them, and entered the house.

They were warmly welcomed by Ora, who, however, anxiously observed the meeting between Dr. Leicester and Bevvie.

Ah! why did the young physician's face flush and voice tremble as he greeted the little beauty? And why did Bevvie's eyes fall and an angry spot rise to her dark cheek as he took her hand?

Heaven of heavens! Was this the commencement of a new complication?

Was there to be more evil to grow out of that concealed marriage?

"Bevvie, come here!" said Miss Orkney, speaking

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more sharply than was her custom to the young creature, who hurried at once to her side.

"You must be housekeeper to-day, my dear, while I have to play hostess! Go and take counsel with Nelie to get up the best dinner you can. And, thanks to the nuns, you know how to do it," she said, in a low tone, inaudible to every one but to her to whom she spoke.

"Oh, I am so glad to be sent away, Ora, dear! You don't know how glad!" replied Bevvie, in the same suppressed tone, as she glided out of the room.

The conversation became general.

"Have any of the neighbors been to see you yet, Ora?" inquired Hyacinth, seating herself beside Miss Orkney. "But what a foolish question for me to ask! Of course they have! Who has been here, Ora?"

"No one," replied Miss Orkney, after a thoughtful pause.

"'No one'? What! Not the Colvilles?"

"No."

"Nor the Farnsworths?"

"No."

"But the Arlingtons have, I know! Because for a year past they have been so anxious to have you come home."

"Indeed, they have not been near me. No one has; not even my aunts from Owlwood," gravely replied Miss Orkney.

"Why, how strange! I never heard of such remissness! And in all of the friends and neighbors, too! If

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one or two had failed to come, we might think that sickness—such as we have had—or business had stopped them! but everybody cannot be sick or busy. Don't you think it very strange, Ora?"

"I have not had time to think of it; I have been too busy to give the subject a single thought, Cynthia."

"But now?" persisted Hyacinth.

"Now, since you mention it, I do indeed think it very strange that not one of our old neighbors has called on me."

"What in the world can be the reason?"

"I cannot tell, my dear," said Ora, gravely, and with a sudden misgiving at her heart.

"I think such neglect is quite unpardonable!" warmly exclaimed Hyacinth.

Ora was glad that Dr. Leicester came up at that moment and put an end to the discussion.

No; it had never occurred to Ora to wonder at the remissness of her old neighbors in their social duties. She had been too deeply interested and too actively busy in other matters. But now, when her attention was called to the circumstance, she felt a vague sense of humiliation.

Why had not her father's and her mother's old friends and relatives come to welcome her home? Why?

She did not dare to press the question upon her own consciousness. But still it overclouded her mind and darkened her spirit.

And Hyacinth, with the best intentions, continually returned to the subject.

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"Don't you think, papa, that it is perfectly outrageous, the way Ora's old neighbors are neglecting her?" she demanded of her father.

"I did not know that they were doing so, my dear," replied the good-humored squire.

"Yes; they are! Not one of them has been to see her since her return!"

"Oh, well, my dear, they will come. Remember that you have only come to-day," said the squire, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, papa! But then Ora knows why we could not get here before—on account of the colored children having the measles, and we being afraid of bringing it to the house; and you, who never went near the sick, did our visiting here for us. It is very different with these other people, whose conduct is quite inexcusable."

The old squire made no reply, but he looked very grave. He really had not known of the neighbors' neglect of Miss Orkney until he now heard it from his daughter, and he felt deeply troubled by the news.

Was it the presence of the blue-eyed baby, the child of charity, that had banished visitors from Hall-in-Umbra? Was the little world of their neighborhood so evil-minded as to attach suspicion to one so pure and so noble as Ora Orkney?

If it did, he would set his face so sternly against such injustice that neither he nor his daughters should in future visit or recognize such people. And two or three of his daughters should stay at Hall-in-Umbra whenever Ora could make them welcome.

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And then, looking toward Miss Orkney and observing the signs of depressed spirits in her, he exerted himself to be cheerful, with so much success that he became, in the language of the country side, "the life of the company."

Every one, inspired by his spirits, became lively, except one—young Dr. Leicester, who seemed grave and absent-minded, and continually looked toward the door, as if expecting some one to enter.

If—as Ora supposed—he was watching for Bevvie, he was disappointed, for he did not see her until the dinner bell called the whole company into the dining room, where Bevvie stood to receive them.

The dinner was perfectly successful, for it combined in its elements and composition the inexhaustible natural resources of the farm, forest and river and the incomparable culinary science of Bevvie, acquired at the convent school.

After dinner the guests strolled about the grounds, until they were recalled to the house by an early tea. And after partaking of that refreshment, and before the shadows of night should render the mountain roads dangerous, they all departed, with the exception of Laurel and Myrtle, who were to remain for a few days' visit.

"I envy those two young ones, Ora. But it will be our turn next," said Hyacinth, as the carriage moved off.

"Yes; Ora will give you all a turn," added the squire.

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CHAPTER XXIX

A NIGHT ALARM

THE four young women left standing on the portico watched the departing visitors out of sight, and then stepped down to take a walk in the garden.

They met the nurse, Rachel, coming in with the baby in her arms.

"The dew is beginning to fall, Miss Ora, and I thought I had better bring him in," Rachel explained.

"Quite right. It will not do to run any risks," assented Ora.

"Oh, please do stop!" exclaimed Laurel. "Do let me look at the baby. Oh, you dear, darling little angel! Oh, Ora, how much nicer to adopt an orphan baby for a pet instead of buying a fancy dog. Oh, Ora, let me take the little darling in my arms!"

The baby was passed from one girl to another and fondled and kissed until it began to cry, whereupon it was restored to the nurse and taken into the house.

The girls continued their ramble until the dampness of the garden, getting wet from the heavy dews, warned them to re-enter the house.

Then they sat down in the oak parlor to play the game of cards called "Old Maid."

And to the great amusement of the party, the old maid always fell to Bevvie.

"You need never hope for a husband, Miss Boone.

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You are doomed to lead apes in—you know where. We don't want to hurt your feelings by mentioning the place of your future activity," said Myrtle gravely.

"Just what I always expected," added Bevvie demurely.

At ten o'clock Ora rang for Old Uncle Charley to come and shut up the house, and then she arose to conduct her young guests to their apartment.

The upper stories of Hall-in-Umbra were not as yet well furnished.

The long room over the drawing room, which had been the guest chamber of the old times, was really the best furnished, and the most comfortable, room in the house.

Ora, in her self-sacrificing generosity, had assigned this apartment to her protégé, but the latter had been frightened out of it, as we have seen; and then she had given Bevvie her own chamber and had taken possession of the long room, and had kept it, notwithstanding the supernatural visitation that had disturbed her first occupancy.

And now she had visitors to stay all night, Ora determined to put them into this guest chamber, and to share Bevvie's apartment every night during their stay.

So she conducted Laurel and Myrtle into the long room, and remained with them until they had undressed and were ready to get into bed.

Laurel and Myrtle were of the class of young ladies who carefully scrutinize every nook and cranny of a

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strange sleeping room, to be sure that no burglars are hiding, before locking themselves in it.

So on this occasion they searched under beds and into closets and behind curtains until they were convinced that there were no others except themselves and their hostess in the chamber.

Then they examined the fastenings of the windows and found them secure.

When they had completed this precautionary task, of which Ora approved, and in which she assisted them, she kissed them good-night and left the room, waiting on the outside of the door until she heard Myrtle turn the key and shoot the bolt.

Then, feeling satisfied that her guests were comfortable and secure from annoyance, Ora crossed the hall and entered Bevvie's bower.

Bevvie was alone with the baby.

Rachel had been told that she need not make up her bed in her young mistress' room that night, as the latter would have Miss Orkney's company; so Rachel had ascended to the attic, to the more congenial society of her old chum Betsy.

"Oh, Ora!" exclaimed Bevvie, as soon as she saw her friend, "I am so very glad you are going to sleep with me to-night! Oh, isn't it pleasant, too, to have friends staying in the house? It is not so awfully, horribly, dismally dreary as it was when there was nobody but you and me and the baby and the servants!"

"Yes; it is very pleasant to have our girl friends here, and we shall have them all in turn for some time yet,"

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replied Miss Orkney, who, being tired, began immediately to prepare for bed.

In half an hour the kerosene light was turned down to the faintest circle of flame, and the two young women got into bed.

Bevvie would have lain there and talked half the night, but Ora was tired and soon fell asleep, leaving her companion still discoursing.

She slept profoundly for several hours, until she was awakened by the baby's cry.

Bevvie, who had lain awake so long in the early part of the night, was now in a deep sleep.

Ora stepped softly out of bed, lifted the wailing babe from his crib, and laid him in his mother's arms.

Bevvie half waked up, gathered the child to her bosom, stilled his cries, and fell asleep again.

Ora now slept no more; she had had her sleep out. She lay there, meditating on all that had passed that day, especially on one circumstance that had been brought to her attention—the coolness of her old neighbors toward herself. Was it possible that people could be so evil in themselves as to impute evil to her? And punish her charity by social ostracism? Well, if this were so, she reflected, she would not be the first who had been persecuted for righteousness' sake, and probably she would not be the last to suffer in a merciful cause; therefore she must bear this trial as best she might, looking to the Lord for help.

In the midst of Ora's meditations, and while Bevvie and the baby were soundly sleeping by her side, she

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was terribly startled by an ear-splitting shriek, followed by a succession of resounding screams, ringing through the house and arousing every sleeper from attic to basement.

Ora sprang out of bed and turned up the light of the kerosene lamp.

Bevvie leaped into the middle of the floor, shaking as with an ague, and crying:

"For Heaven's sake, what is the matter, Ora?"

The baby, startled out of its sleep and frightened out of its wits, added its shrill squalls to the confusion.

And all this passed in one minute of time, during which the screams continued, accompanied now by the rushing of many feet.

"Do take up the baby and quiet it, while I run out to see what is the matter, Bevvie!" exclaimed Ora, as she hastily unlocked and unbolted the door.

As she opened the door Laurel and Myrtle Goodwin, in their white bed-gowns, fell shrieking into her arms.

"What is the matter? My dear girls, what is the matter?" cried Ora, as she drew them into the room and pushed each down into an arm chair, into which each sank in a half-swooning condition.

"Lord sake, young mist'ess, is it robbers or murderers?" cried old Charley, who had been roused from his lair in the kitchen loft and now appeared at the door, with an old, rusty blunderbuss in his hands and terror in his eyes, while behind him, clinging to the skirts of his hastily donned coat, stood, trembling and silent, the three negro women of the house.

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"I don't know, Charley! take those women away! Laurel! Myrtle! try to compose yourselves, my dears, and tell me what has frightened you," said Ora, in a soothing voice, to her guests.

They had ceased to scream, but were lying back in their easy chairs, pale and panting.

"Oh, Ora! Something—horrible—looked into my face!" gasped Laurel, trembling like an aspen.

"You must have been dreaming, dear!" said Miss Orkney, in a gentle tone.

"Oh, no, no, no! Myrtle saw it as well as I!" shuddered the panic-stricken girl.

Ora turned to look at Myrtle.

"Oh, yes, Ora! I saw it, too!—the fearful thing!—all black skin—all eyes and hair!" panted Myrtle, holding her hand upon her throbbing heart.

"A dog?" suggested Miss Orkney.

"Oh, no, no, it was in the human shape—but such a horrible shape!—It was a devil, I think!" gasped Laurel.

"Were you asleep?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Yes! We were both sound asleep! I awoke first—I don't know what woke me— and I saw the awful shape bending down over me—looking at me with its awful eyes! its unearthly face so close to mine—I screamed, and that woke Myrtle, and she saw it and screamed—and we both jumped out of bed and ran for the door—I don't know how I ever got it unlocked, or unbolted, my heart beat and my hands trembled so! I thought I should have died of fright, before I got out!

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Oh! what a house! All is true that they said about it! Oh, Ora, how can you stay in it? You must not think it hard if we go home to-morrow morning! I would not stay in this house another night—not for a hundred thousand dollars!" cried Laurel, shuddering from head to foot.

"I am so grieved that you have been frightened, my dear girls," said Ora gently; "but stay here and try to compose yourselves. I will endeavor to get at the root of this mystery."

Then taking the kerosene lamp and calling to the negroes, who still lingered in the passage between the two rooms, she said:

"Come all of you with me; let us search that chamber."

But no one obeyed her except Old Charley. The negro women shrank back and hid themselves in the shadow of the passage.

Ora, carrying the lighted lamp, entered the long bed chamber, followed by Old Charley, bearing his blunderbuss.

Up and down and all around the room they went, but found no sign of any other visitor except the two young girls who had slept there.

Then Ora directed the old man to put down his gun and open the window shutters.

He obeyed at once, and Ora saw that it was already daylight, and the eastern horizon over the tops of the forest trees was all aflame with the approach of the rising sun.

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"Open all the windows in the house, Charley. I hope the sunshine will dispel these supernatural terrors as well as the night shadows. Let in the sunlight."

CHAPTER XXX

INVESTIGATING THE MYSTERY

On life's pathway, overshadowed,
Once an angel could be found;
Now that vision bright has faded,
Blackest night is all around.

Children when in darkness straying,
Fancying specters round them throng,
Lull the dread their hearts dismaying
Singing loud a merry song.

I, a child forlorn, advancing,
Carol through the darkness drear,
Though the song be not entrancing,
Yet it drives away the fear.—HEINE.

THE level rays of the rising sun streamed through the wide open east windows, flooding the long room with golden light.

"You had better make a little wood fire here, Uncle Charley, and shut down the windows. The mountain air is chill these late September mornings," said Miss Orkney, as she left the guest chamber to cross the hall and re-enter Bevvie's room.

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There she found one girl lying prostrate across the foot of the bed and the other reclining, exhausted, in the easy chair.

Bevvie was standing at one of the corner washstands, washing her face and hands.

The baby had been taken away in Rachel's arms to be dressed.

"Well, well?" gasped Laurel, who was half fainting in the rocking chair.

"Well, well?" panted Myrtle, who was almost swooning on the bed.

"Well, well!" mocked Ora, with a forced laugh, "I have very carefully inspected the haunted room and have found no vestige of a ghostly visitant! Come and return to the room with me. You will find it full of sunshine and cheerfulness."

"Not for the world," shivered Myrtle.

"Not for a thousand worlds!" shuddered Laurel.

"Then shall I have your clothes brought to you? Will you dress in this room?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Oh, yes, yes, if you please; if we shall not be in the way," replied Laurel.

"I had no idea it was morning. It was as dark as pitch in the room, except for the dim light on the mantel piece, when I awoke to find that—unearthly horror bending over me!" cried Myrtle, cowering at the memory.

"Yes; for you see the window shutters are of solid oak boards and let in no ray of light. But, Myrtle, my

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dear, tell me, if you can, what was the specter like?" inquired Ora.

"Like?—like? Oh! how can I tell you what it was like! Like nothing in the heavens above, or in the earth below, or the waters under the earth! It was a shapeless, nameless horror!"

"Yet you saw it?"

"Saw it? Yes! The terrible face was bending over me, within a few inches of my own. Ugh! Oh! Ooo!" shuddered Myrtle, burying her head in the bed clothes.

"Then the think had a face?"

"A face? Yes—the monstrous mockery of a face! Oh! fancy waking up in the dark, and seeing dimly, bending over you, a huge, round black thing—a shadowy thing, with something like shadowy black snakes, or horns, twined all around its head and standing out on the top and sides; and in the middle of this some travesty of human features—a pair of great, rolling black and white eyes, large white teeth—oh! Ooo! Don't ask me any more—I can't! I can't talk of it!" gasped Myrtle, on the verge of hysterics.

Ora went silently out of the room, re-entered the haunted chamber, gathered up the clothing and other belongings of her guests, and carried them to their owners.

Leaving them to make their morning toilets, she took her own clothing and returned to the haunted chamber to wash and dress there.

But for her own experiences, Ora would have treated the story of her guests with incredulous derision; hav-

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ing seen what she had, she could not do so. She knew that Myrtle and Laurel had not been the subjects of a nightmare or of a too realistic dream; but they had been terrified by the same mysterious apparition which had startled herself, and which had frightened Bevvie nearly out of her senses.

But what was this creature, and whence came it and where did it go?

She recalled the facts that on the first night on which she had slept in the "haunted chamber," she had so thoroughly searched that room that not even a large insect could have remained hidden in any part of it; and that then she had fastened the windows and doors so strongly that the place might have stood a long siege before it could have been forced open; and, finally, that after she had so secured the apartment against intrusion from without, she had given it a second and final search, even looking up the chimney on the bare possibility that some one might be lodged there; and then being thoroughly convinced that no one was in the room, and that no one could get into the room, she went to bed and fell asleep.

And yet, notwithstanding all these precautions, she had been strangely awakened to be startled out of her self-possession by seeing in her room a grotesque and horrible being going through impish and fantastic grimaces and gestures, and leaping, diving and whirling in such demoniac evolutions as might seem utterly impossible to a creature of mere flesh and blood.

She had found courage to call out to this creature to

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demand what it was and why it was there when—hey, presto!—it had vanished from sight like a flash of lightning!

She had arisen and turned up the light of her kerosene lamp, and searched the room, to find all her fastenings as secure as she had left them, and no sign of her mysterious visitor lurking anywhere about.

Yet—how had the imp got out, through the iron-bound, barred and bolted doors and windows? And how, indeed, had it ever got in? Where did it come from? Where did it go to? Above all, what was it? Of what nature and constitution? Of what order of being?

Ora could not decide, could not even form a conjecture! She felt, too, that if she should meditate too long on this subject, she should become morbid.

Saying to herself:

"It is a mystery that I cannot fathom and must not think of," she threw off all thought of the specter, and began to wash and dress for the day.

When she had completed her toilet she left the room, and found Bevvie and the two visitors standing at the front window of the hall, waiting for her.

They were talking in low whispers of all the stories that were afloat in the neighborhood concerning the "haunted house."

"Come, my dear girls. Breakfast will soon be on the table," said Ora, as she preceded them down the stairs.

At the foot she met Betsy, with the iron hand bell in her fist, ready to ring out. Seeing the ladies on their

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way down, she forbore to sound the alarm, and merely saying:

"B'eakfas' ready, miss," turned and preceded them into the oak parlors.

The four young women were soon seated around the table, doing but scant justice, however, to the fragrant coffee, rich cream, delicate rice cakes, luscious honey, and other country dainties.

Myrtle and Laurel had lost their vivid bloom and vivacious expressions, and were white and dejected-looking. Bevvie was pale and depressed. Ora exerted herself to rouse the spirits of her guests.

She dismissed Betsy from waiting on the table, and they were left alone. She sought to make a diversion from the specter by talking of the missing casket and of the humors of the search.

She told them how her own house was divided against itself by two factions, represented by the old family servants and the women she had brought from Washington; how the country negroes had come to her and whispered confidentially that:

"It war nubbuddy but dem dar offscourin's ob de yeth wot she had fotch f'om de city wot stole dat caskit."

And similarly how the city negroes had come to her and whispered mysteriously that:

"It war sartainly dese yere low-life country cullured people wot had made 'way wid dat caskit."

She said that she had often overheard them bandying the epithets, "Low-life country darkies!" and "Po' trash city niggars!"

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And she told her guests of the many odd parcels that had been brought to her by the poor whites and the negroes, in the hope of winning the reward she had offered for her lost documents.

Packets of old love letters, purloined, no doubt, from their master's or mistress's desks; rolls of old receipts, a parcel of old election tickets, a bill of sale, a list of goods, and many other articles, insisting that they came out of the lost casket and must be the papers wanted, and persistently claiming the large reward.

Ora dwelt upon the persecutions she had suffered from the hands of these poor, ignorant beings, who, in their disappointment and indignation, had not hesitated to accuse her of withholding the reward they had honestly won.

But all that Ora's anecdotes gained was a faint smile now and then, and even that was given more in compliment to the narrator than from any real enjoyment of the stories.

Evidently their spirits were too deeply depressed to be raised by ordinary means.

After breakfast, instead of taking out their knitting to improve the time while talking, as was their industrious habit, the two visitors seated themselves, one each side of Ora, on the bench of the front piazza, and began to beg her to leave the "haunted house."

"Do, dearest Ora. Rent out the house or leave it to the rats. And come and live with us. You and your adopted baby, and Bevvie and all," pleaded Myrtle.

"What! Be ejected by a ghost! Not if I have

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formed the acquaintance of Ora Orkney, my dear, will that young woman forsake the home of her forefathers upon any such nonsensical grounds," laughed the young mistress of the mansion. "But I thank you heartily all the same, for your munificent offer of unlimited hospitality, my darling," she added.

"Oh, Ora! if you should see that specter once, only once, you would never spend another night in the house," put in Laurel.

"Would I not? I doubt it," replied Miss Orkney, smiling at the memory of her own nocturnal experiences.

"Do not tempt your fate by staying here, Ora. You might be frightened out of your senses," pleaded Myrtle.

"I doubt it," repeated Ora.

"I have heard of people being frightened to death. And if you should see that awful specter, Ora, it might even kill you," added Laurel.

"I'll risk it," said Miss Orkney.

"Oh, you obstinate girl! Oh, Ora! how shall we be able to go away this morning and leave you in this frightful house?" said Myrtle, ready to cry.

"Go away! What do you mean, my dear? You were to stay over Sunday with me. You were to stay, indeed, until your father should bring Jessamine and Hyacinth to relieve you!" exclaimed Ora.

"Oh, yes; I know that such was the plan; but, dear Ora, both Laurel and myself would die of fear at the very thought of staying here to-night! We could not

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do it; indeed, indeed we could not!" earnestly declared Myrtle.

"But, oh! it is so hard to leave you here, Ora! I cannot bear to think of it! Do come and stay with us!" pleaded Laurel.

"My dear girls, it is impossible! I am a soldier's daughter! I cannot desert my post! Besides, I have sworn to outstay the specter and unravel this mystery. But, to change the subject, how do you propose to reach Welcoming, as your father was not to come for you until next week?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Oh, you will drive us over in your pony carriage; or, you will lend it to us, for I can drive," said Myrtle.

"But suppose I refuse to do anything of the sort, my dears? Suppose I decline, upon hospitable grounds alone, to aid your sudden and most unexpected departure from my house?"

"Then we both would set out to walk home, if we should drop by the way. Anything would be preferable to sleeping another night in a haunted house," added Laurel.

"But, my dears, how can you be so absurd as to call this a haunted house? A haunted house in the nineteenth century, indeed!" scornfully exclaimed Miss Orkney.

"Ora, we saw the specter!" solemnly replied Myrtle.

"And we would rather die than see it again!" added Laurel.

"Well, you need not risk it. See here! Listen! Do not go off in this abrupt manner to-day. Stay here, and

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you shall sleep in Bevvie's room, where no one has ever been disturbed; and you will sleep peacefully to-night. Bevvie and myself can go up into the third story," urged Ora.

"You are kind, you are very kind, dear Ora, but it is of no use talking of this room or that room. We should not feel safe in any room!" exclaimed Myrtle.

"And we would as lief die at once as spend another night in the house," added her sister.

"I am very, very sorry," murmured Miss Orkney.

"But you will let us have the pony carriage, Ora?" inquired Myrtle.

"Yes, of course, or rather, I will myself drive you; than I shall know that you will reach home in safety. When do you wish to go?" inquired Miss Orkney, gravely, and somewhat proudly, for she felt wounded by this cowardly desertion.

"Thank you, Ora darling! We would like to go at once! Just as soon as possible," answered Myrtle.

"Yes, indeed, Ora, for to tell you the truth, in regard to myself, I am not only afraid to re-enter the house, but actually I am afraid to look over my shoulder into that hallway—haunted—haunted—haunted!—is running through my mind all the time. Oh, Ora, if you would only leave this dreadful place and come and live with us!" pleaded Laurel.

"I have said thank you, dear, but I cannot do so," replied Ora.

"But you will take us home, dear Ora?"

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"Yes: I will go and order the pony carriage to be ready. Would you like your bonnets and sacques to be brought out here?" ironically demanded Miss Orkney.

"Oh, no; not exactly so bad as that! We are not so cowardly as to be afraid to go up stairs and put on our things—so that we do not go into that haunted chamber," said Myrtle, deprecatingly.

"But, indeed, I am half afraid," added Laurel, deprecatingly.

Nevertheless she followed her sister into the house and up the stairs; but they paused in the upper hall; for their bonnets and sacques were hanging up in the closets of the long bedroom, where they had been frightened by the specter, and they would neither venture into that "haunted chamber" themselves, though it was broad daylight, nor could they induce Bevvie, whom they found in her own apartment, nor the nurse, nor the housemaid, who were on the first floor, to go in for them.

They had to stand in that upper hall, and wait until Ora came in from the stables and came upstairs.

Ora, on hearing of the difficulty, could scarcely repress a contemptuous smile.

She passed into the long room, silently, however, and handed out her visitors' hats, sacques, hand-bags and all their other belongings, and then she dressed for her drive, in the long room, while they dressed in the hall.

As soon as they were all ready, they went down stairs together, kissed Bevvie and the baby good-by, and en-

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tered the pony carriage, which stood waiting at the door.

Myrtle and Laurel sat in the back.

Ora seated herself in front and took the reins.

CHAPTER XXXI

A SURPRISE FOR MR. GOODWIN

That was a beautiful morning drive through the thick woods of Umbra, where the branches of the trees intermingled overhead and shaded the open pony carriage from the too brilliant rays of the sun, and where the heavy masses of dark green foliage were just beginning to kindle into the crimson, purple and orange glows of autumn, and even to strew the road beneath with leaves that burned like coals of fire.

In this deep wilderness, where travelers seldom passed and sportsmen never intruded, birds and quadrupeds lived in peace and multiplied in great numbers, so that there was an unceasing flutter of small wings or patter of tiny feet in the thicket on either side of the road; and frequently, also, the loud, jubilant song of an oriole, perched high in some tree, or the sudden burst of a great black buzzard from the bushes, to rise and sail away on broad, dusky wings to some distant field of prey; or there was the leap of a squirrel or the bound of a fox across the road.

Perhaps it was from the effect of Ora's long life in

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the city convent, that she now enjoyed so much the novelty of these country sounds and sights. Her better nature was awakened by them. All her good humor returned. She regretted her recent angry feelings toward her young companions. If they were weak, timid and superstitious, they could not help it and should not be blamed for it.

So Ora looked over her left shoulder and spoke to Myrtle, who was seated behind her.

"I hope you are comfortable there, darling?"

"Oh, yes; thank you, Ora, quite so," responded Myrtle, eagerly accepting the olive branch.

"We would feel better if you were going home with us to stop," added Laurel.

"No more of that, dear Laurel! I have told you that I intend to 'fight it out on this line'!" replied Ora.

"You cannot! Remember that you do not war with flesh and blood, but with the powers and principalities of the air," said Myrtle, solemnly.

"I doubt it," replied Ora, using her skeptical formula.

"If you persist, you will perish in this contest," added Laurel.

"I'll risk it!" said Ora, with her obstinate formula.

Myrtle was beginning with a rejoinder on the same theme, when Ora stopped her, good-humoredly, by saying:

"I did not break the silence to talk of specters. Now tell me what you suppose your father will think of your sudden and unceremonious return home?"

"Oh, I shall tell him all about it, and I suppose he

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will say that it was very cowardly of us to leave you so, Ora—as it really was," replied Myrtle.

"Well, I can't help it if he does. I would rather be blamed than frightened to death, any day," added Laurel.

Ora said no more.

They were now approaching the verge of the woods that opened upon their father's outlying fields.

Soon they reached a more open space, and entered a labyrinth of lanes, that, leading between fields and orchards, pastures and barnyards, finally led them to the farmhouse.

Old Mr. Goodwin was on horseback before his own door.

On seeing this unexpected arrival he alighted, threw his bridle to a boy in attendance, and walked to the pony carriage as it drew up and stopped.

"Why!" he exclaimed, smiling broadly, "this is a very unexpected pleasure! Come to surprise me with a call, eh? Couldn't stay away from the old dad even one day without making him a flying visit? How kind of you to bring them, Ora! And now I think I shall not allow you to return at all to-day."

While he spoke he had been shaking hands all around, and assisting his two daughters to alight.

Ora still held the reins until they were safely out of the carriage.

"We have caught you in a trap now, Miss Orkney, and we shall not let you escape. Instead of letting these madcaps go back with you this afternoon, we shall

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keep you with us indefinitely," added the jovial old gentleman, as he handed Ora from her seat, while the negro boy got up on the box, took the reins, and drove the carriage around to the stables.

"I thank you very much, dear Mr. Goodwin, but I must return to the hall this afternoon. Think of Bevvie left there alone," said Ora, as they all passed into the house, where they were met in the hall by the elder girls, when a very merry and very noisy gathering ensued.

sued.

"And pray, why didn't you bring Bevvie with you?" demanded the squire, when the bustle of the reception was all over, and the family with their visitor were quietly seated in the parlor.

"Why, because I only came to bring these two spoiled children, who insisted on returning home to-day," Ora explained.

"Ah! a flying visit to the old dad! Well, just as I thought. We'll have an early dinner, so as to give you all time enough to reach the hall before dark."

"But, papa, we are not going back with Ora," said Myrtle.

"We have come to stay at home," added Laurel.

"What! what! What is all this about?" demanded the squire. "I thought you were going to stay over Sunday at the hall!" said the surprised and perplexed squire.

"But, papa, we couldn't stay there!" exclaimed Myrtle, quickly.

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"And, moreover, we would not even try to stay there another night for a thousand worlds! We would rather come home and take any amount of lecturing than to stay there and be frightened out of our senses by specters," added Laurel, rather defiantly.

"Oh, I am not going to lecture you. I never do useless things. I never scold any whom I do not hope to reform. I have too deep a contempt for you both to have any hope for you; so do not fear a scolding at my hands," said the old squire, with withering coldness.

"Oh, papa, papa!" exclaimed both girls in a breath, while blushes suffused their cheeks, and tears filled their eyes.

"Pray do not be hard on them, Mr. Goodwin," pleaded Ora. "Please remember that they are only very young girls, scarcely past childhood, and that stouter hearts than theirs have quailed before the supernatural terrors of the haunted hall."

"Haunted hen house!" scornfully exclaimed the old man. "It turns me sick to think that these two girls should make such fools and cowards of themselves."

"Remember, Marse Tomfilius," said Ora, with a smile, "that the Kemptons themselves could not endure the nocturnal horrors of Hall-in-Umbra."

"The Kemptons? The curs! The cowardly curs! I did not criticise their conduct at the time of their flight because I was so much obliged to them for going before their lease had expired, and leaving the place free for your occupation. But they were a set of craven poltroons—every man and woman of them—to be put

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to flight by a few unexplained disturbances, and to go off and give the venerable old hall a bad name."

"Marse Tomfilius, you don't seem to be in one of your saintly moods to-day," said Ora, affectionately.

"No, my dear, I am not. I am disgusted with human nature!" retorted the old man.

"That is to say, you are displeased with your two daughters," suggested Ora.

"I am angry with them, Ora!" exclaimed the squire.

"I understand—

> And to be wroth with one we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain,"

quoted Ora.

"Who wrote that? He knew mankind, whoever he was," said the squire.

"It was Coleridge, in his poem of 'Christabel.' Come, Mr. Goodwin, be just to your girls," pleaded Ora.

"Father," said each offending daughter as they simultaneously approached him where he sat, and standing, the one on his right and the other on his left, slipped each an arm around his neck.

"Father, if it were possible for you to do one thing, you would not feel such a contempt for us," pleaded one.

"What is that?" curtly inquired the squire.

"If you could sleep in that haunted chamber one night and see what we have seen!" pleaded the other.

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"Nonsense! Nonsense! Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the squire.

"I do not quite agree with you, Mr. Goodwin. And I do really wish that you would try the experiment of your daughters' suggesting," gravely remarked Ora.

"What! Go to Hall-in-Umbra and sleep in the haunted chamber?"

"Yes, if you please."

"Very well, then, I will do so! And the sooner I do it, the better! I will return with you this afternoon, Ora, and occupy the haunted chamber to-night. What do you say?"

"Thank you very much!"

"But I tell you what, my young lady! If to-night any joker should undertake to play tricks upon travelers in the haunted chamber, they will come to grief right speedily," exclaimed the squire.

"You can search the room and secure it perfectly before you retire," replied Ora.

"I shall take precious good care to do that, you may be sure," confidently replied the old squire.

"Just as we did!" said Myrtle.

"And yet we saw that horrible, that appalling specter!" shuddered Laurel.

The old squire, who had unconsciously stolen an arm around each girl's waist as they stood on his right and left—so short-lived was his anger—now drew them closer to himself and turned a laughing face from one to the other as he asked:

"This 'horrible, appalling specter'—what was it like?

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Had it horns and hoofs? A long tail whose tip was the head of a hissing serpent? Had it flaming eyes? Did it breathe fire and brimstone from its nostrils? Was its body covered with scales and each scale the shell of a living snapping turtle? Come, tell me!"

"Oh, papa, papa, do not mock our fear!" said Myrtle.

"Dear papa, see for yourself! You are brave and strong, and the vision will not madden you or murder you," added Laurel.

"No, no, not likely; not to any very great extent, my dears. There, now. You are forgiven. But don't you ever dare to be such cowards as to turn your backs on a friend the second time, or I will never forgive you again! Now there! Don't cling to me as if you were drowning. Let me go! Ora, my dear, I hope you will excuse me! I was just about to ride over to the lower barn when you arrived. I must go now, but will see you again at dinner; and of course I will be your escort this afternoon. Good-by!"

The old squire left the room, and his horse's hoofs were the next minute heard galloping away.

Meanwhile Hyacinth, Jessamine, and Pink, who had been silent and awe-stricken listeners to the conversation about the haunted chamber, now gathered around their younger sisters and Ora, with eager questions on the subject.

Myrtle and Laurel told all they knew—told it in fragmentary and spasmodic installments, so that instead of giving their hearers any clear idea of the nocturnal ap-

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parition, they only inspired them with a vague, vast horror.

The girls did not leave the house, as was their custom in fine weather, to take a walk through garden or orchard, but they sat there in the old-fashioned parlor, gathered into a close group talking of haunted houses, apparitions and other supernatural subjects, without daring to look over their shoulders for fear of seeing something that should turn them into stone.

Ora did not share in this feeling, nor did she contribute to the subject under discussion. She let no word drop of her own mysterious adventure in the haunted chamber, and when closely pressed with questions, she gave evasive and diplomatic answers. She was heartily glad when the return of Mr. Goodwin and the announcement of dinner broke up this ghostly debate.

After the excellent dinner, which they all enjoyed with as much relish as if they had never heard of a haunted house or a spectral visitant, the girls went out for a short promenade on the shaded front lawn, while the old squire sat and smoked his clay pipe in the old arm chair on the porch.

At five o'clock they were all called in to an early tea, with delicate biscuits and butter, fruit and cake.

At six the pony carriage was brought to the door, and Ora took leave of her friends and started on her homeward journey, escorted by the old squire.

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CHAPTER XXXII

LYING IN WAIT

The drive home to Umbra, in the evening, was quite as pleasant as had been the drive out to Welcoming in the morning.

The old squire sat on the front seat and held the reins. Ora reclined on the back seat and folded her arms.

"I have a coachman now, and can 'take mine ease in my' chaise," she said, with an assumption of importance.

"You can have a coachman in me whenever you please, my lady," gallantly replied the old gentleman.

"Thank you, sir! This, then, is your trial trip. We will see how you manage the reins before we engage you."

"Ah! how anxious I am to excel! How my heart beats! I fear my intense anxiety will interfere with my driving."

They were now threading the lanes that led, in labyrinth fashion, through the extensive lands of Squire Goodwin, dividing the broad fields and orchards from each other. The sun was sinking to the horizon in the west, the full moon was rising in the east.

"It will be dark in the woods, notwithstanding the moon," said Ora.

"Well, my child, we cannot lose our way, though it

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were pitch dark. The road, though very winding, has no branches or crossings, and it is so walled up on either side with thickets that we could not possibly wander out of it," replied the old squire.

"Yes; I know. To me there is a sort of enchantment in the woods of Umbra. I was very young when I went away to the convent school. I was but little over five years old, yet I remember the tales the negroes used to tell of them, and of the caves in the rocks, where the woods begin to climb the mountain's side, and of the runaway slaves and the robbers that in the old times were supposed to be hidden in them. Are there really such caves, Mr. Goodwin?"

"A great many of them—a chain of them, I believe, my dear."

"Oh! how I should like to explore them! Will you be my guide, Mr. Goodwin?" eagerly demanded Ora.

The old gentleman turned his laughing, gray-bearded face toward her and said:

"Will I be your guide, indeed! Through brambles, and briars, and thorns, and poisoned ivy, and rattlesnakes, scorpions, tree frogs, and all sorts of deadly plants and venomous reptiles? No, my dear; I don't think I will!"

"Please, Marse Tomfilius!"

"See her, Ora! The story of those caves ever having sheltered runaway negroes, highway robbers, or any other human beings, however desperate, or at however remote a period of time, is only legendary and altogether fabulous!"

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"Oh! I am so sorry! There is another youthful illusion fled!" said Ora, with pretended regret.

"You sanguinary little fiend! Are you sorry there were no desperate negroes or bloodthirsty robbers hidden in those caverns?"

"Oh! you know, if the tales had been true, they would have lent a sort of interest to the place. But though the illusions have fled, the caves remain, and I want to see them."

"You cannot, my dear. The entrances are choked up with fallen fragments of rock and thick growths of thorn; and the caves are often flooded with water, and always full of dark, treacherous pools, deep enough to drown the heedless explorer."

"Oh, Mr. Goodwin! you only make me want to see them more anxiously than I did before."

"Very likely, for—you are a girl! But here we are at the entrance of the Dark Wood. Now we must be careful!"

The sun had now set, leaving a rich crimson afterglow on the western sky. The full moon was well up, above the eastern horizon.

But as soon as the travelers had turned into the road leading through the thick woods, both afterglow and silver moon were hidden from sight.

Mr. Goodwin had to drive slowly and cautiously, for though they could not wander from the wood-walled road, it was very possible to bring the pony carriage into collision with a protruding branch or bush.

They drove on, talking but little, for two hours,

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during which they passed the thickest part of the wood and drew near Hall-in-Umbra. The moon was now so high that her beams struck through the thinner foliage of the trees and threw some light upon their dark path.

"To-morrow, with your leave, my dear Ora, I will go home and bring Hyacinth to you! She is not a Joan of Arc exactly; but she is the pluckiest of all my girls. And we will stay with you for a few days to see if we can oust the ghost. What do you say?"

"Oh! thank you so very, very much, dear Mr. Goodwin!" warmly responded Ora.

"You approve, then?"

"With all my grateful heart! Yes, indeed!"

A few more turns and twists through sparser woods and they drew up before Hall-in-Umbra.

Lights gleamed through the windows of the oak parlor, to the right of the front door, and a dark group of people were crouching together on the front porch.

"Is that you, Ora?" inquired a quavering voice that Miss Orkney scarcely recognized as belonging to Bevvie.

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, how late you are! It is after nine o'clock, Ora! It is very, very imprudent in you, you know, to be driving out so late, and through those dark woods alone, too."

"I am not alone, dear. Mr. Goodwin is with me," Ora explained, as she gave her hand to the gentleman in question, who had alighted to assist her to do so.

"Oh, I am so glad of that, Ora!"

"But why are you sitting out here in this chill night

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air, my love? You, I think, are 'very, very imprudent.'"

"Oh, Ora! I was afraid to stay in the house after what happened last night. We were all afraid except Aunt Nelie. She says she would not be afraid of Satan and all his imps, where there was a baby about, and so she is sitting down by the baby's crib in my room, watching him until we all come up. All the rest of us are here."

"Is Charley there?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"Yes, young mist'ess; Cha'ly's here," answered that individual for himself.

"Well, then, take the carriage and horse around to the stable, and see that you rub him down well, and give him a good feed."

"Hi, young mist'ess, who is you talking to 'bout hosses? I as was a groom to ole Marse Mudoc Orkney, when yer gran'daddy was a boy! Think I don't know? Hik-hik-hik!" laughed the old man, in a little, low, guttural tone, as he got into the pony chaise and drove off in the direction of the stables.

Meanwhile Mr. Goodwin had entered the porch and shaken hands with Bevvie.

"Come into the house, all of you!" exclaimed Ora, in a peremptory tone, as she led the way to the lighted oak parlor. "Is this a plot, I would like to know, got up to give young Dr. Leicester half a dozen cases of pleurisy and pneumonia?"

"Oh, Mr. Goodwin, I am so very, very glad you have come. I have been so frightened and miserable all day

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and night. You are going to stay all night, are you not?" eagerly demanded Bevvie.

"Why, of course I am; I am the knight errant who has come to the castle to meet in mortal combat the dragon, or the griffin, or the ogre, or the bogy, or whatever it is that makes your lives a burden to you," said the squire, solemnly.

"Take the arm chair, dear Don Quixote, and have some refreshments before you retire," said Ora, pushing her father's "sleepy hollow" up to the round table for the squire's accommodation.

"I will sit here for a while, my dear," said the old man, dropping into the seat, "but I will have no refreshments, not even a cracker, or a crumb! I want no dreams, visions, or nightmares to-night! I want a clear head as well as a stout heart and a strong hand to cope with your nocturnal mystery and terror."

"After all, you are right," assented Ora, and then excusing herself to the party, she took one of the wax candles from the mantel piece and went up stairs into the long bedroom to light the kerosene lamps, put fresh towels on the washstand, fresh water in the ewer, and clean linen on the bed, and new combs and brushes on the bureau.

All this Ora chose to do in person, rather than to hold any unseemly controversy with her women servants, who would every one of them object to entering the haunted chamber on any pretext whatever.

Lastly, she gathered up all her own outlying feminine belongings, took them into Bevvie's chamber, and de-

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scended the stairs to rejoin her friends in the oak parlor. A few minutes later Old Charley came in from the stables to shut up the house.

When this duty had been performed Ora put a candle in his hands and said:

"You will attend Mr. Goodwin to his room, the long bed chamber, and wait on him there."

Old Charley took the candle, and though his jaw dropped and his eyes started with amazement and terror, he did not dream of the possibility of contesting his mistress's will, as one of the women might have done.

"Dis is de way, Marse Tomfilius, please, sar," he said, with his best bow, to the guest, and then involuntarily added: "Lord-a-messy bress my po' ole brack soul! I hope he ain't gwine to ax me to sleep in de room 'long of him!"

Mr. Goodwin bowed to the two young ladies and followed Old Charley and his candle up stairs.

Ora and Bevvie lingered for a few minutes below and then went up to their rooms.

In the upper hall they met Old Charley coming out; and they heard their guest in the haunted chamber turn the key in the lock and shoot the bolt on the door after the exit of the old man.

"Did you fasten all the windows in that room?" inquired Miss Orkney.

"You may jes' take yer Bible oaf, as Marse Tomfilius did, young mist'ess! He didn't trus' me to do it. He did it hisse'f. Bofe windys! De King ob Jerusalem an' all his hostesses couldn't get in," replied the old man.

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"And—did you search the room to his satisfaction?"

"He did. Wouldn't trust me. He did! Yer may take yer Bible oaf ob dat, too. Sarched ebberywhar—ebberywhar! 'Deed, ef I didn' begin to fink an he was gwine to pull down de plasterin', an' tear up de floor, in de sarch! And den, didn't yer har him lock an' bolt de do' arter me? Funnelly fool!—beggin' ob yer pardon, young mist'ess—to fink as locks an' bolts an' bars could keep ghoses out!"

"Well, good night, Uncle Charley," said Miss Orkney.

"Good night, young mist'ess. 'Deed, laws knows as I rudder it would be him dan me a-gwine to stay all night by myse'f in dat dere ha'nted room! 'Deed, it's de trufe!" growled the old negro, as he trudged off to seek his dormitory in the loft over the back kitchen.

Ora then passed into Bevvie's chamber, and the two young women retired to bed.

The developments of the night will be related in the sequel to this volume, entitled "The Mysterious Marriage." This is published in handsome cloth binding, uniform with this volume.

THE END

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If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

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